

كِتَابُ التَّوْحِيدِ

# KITĀB AL-TAWHĪD

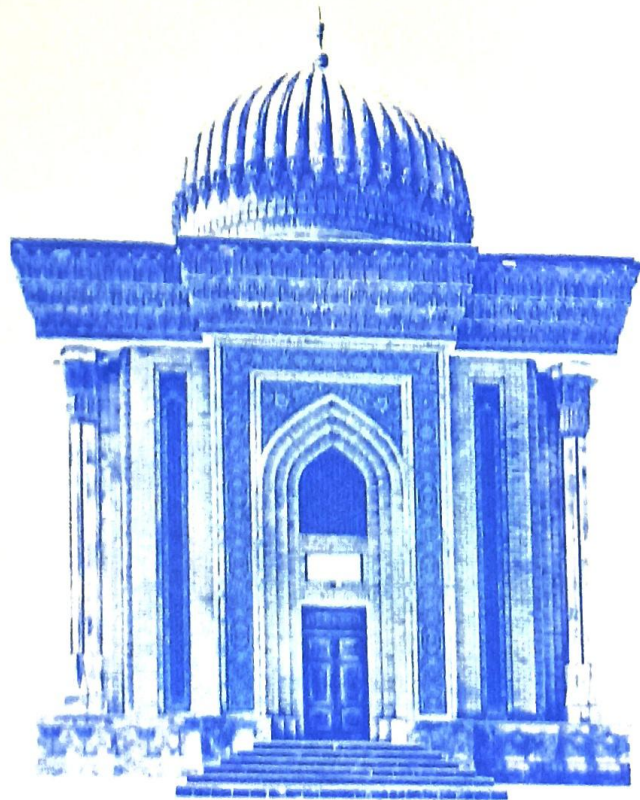
*The Book of Monotheism*

Abū Manṣūr  
AL-MĀTURĪDĪ

Translated by  
Tahir Uluç

Edited with annotations  
and an introduction by  
Ramon Harvey

— I —



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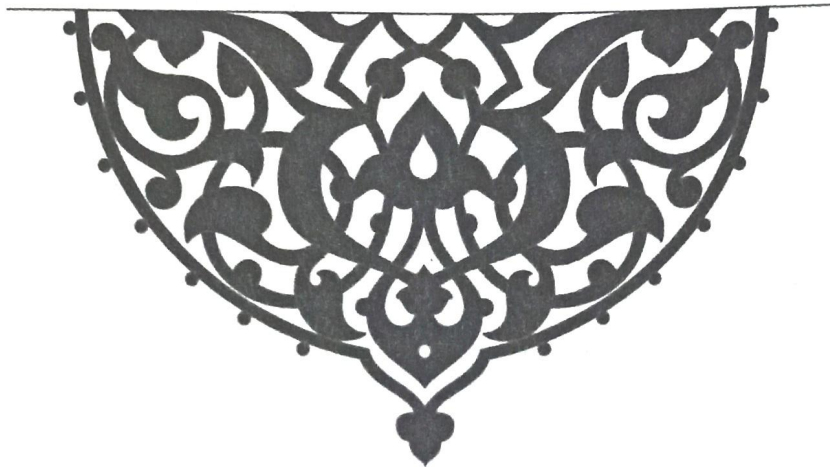


# كِتَابُ التَّوْحِيدِ

**KITĀB AL-TAWHĪD**

**The Book of Monotheism**

**Volume I**



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## KITĀB AL-TAWHĪD

### The Book of Monotheism

#### Volume I

Abū Manṣūr  
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## Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī

Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Samarqandī al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)

al-Māturīdī, born in the village of Māturīd near Samarqand, occupies a position of eminence within the annals of Islamic intellectual history, primarily due to his seminal work, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. This comprehensive theological treatise, a cornerstone of Sunnī intellectual tradition, systematically elucidates and defends fundamental Islamic doctrines from a Ḥanafī perspective.

Born during the waning years of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate, al-Māturīdī witnessed the rise of the Sāmānids in his native region. While biographical details concerning his formative years remain limited, his scholarly pursuits flourished under the tutelage of eminent Ḥanafī jurists such as Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Jūzjānī and Abū Naṣr al-Iyāḍī. Within *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, al-Māturīdī eloquently demonstrates the indispensable role of both reason and revelation in the attainment of religious understanding. Through meticulous analysis, he addresses intricate theological questions pertaining to God's existence and attributes, the nature of prophethood, and other pivotal issues. By adeptly refuting divergent theological viewpoints and articulating a distinct theological framework, al-Māturīdī's work continues to exert a profound influence within Sunnī Islam, solidifying his legacy as the founder of the influential Māturīdī school of theology, eponymously designated as Māturīdism.

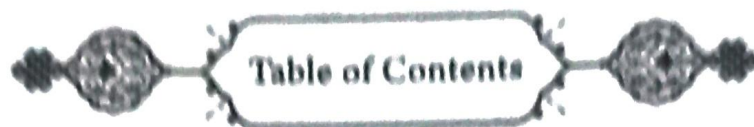
## Tahir Uluç (Prof. Dr.)

Professor Tahir Uluç is a leading scholar of Islamic Philosophy at Necmettin Erbakan University's Divinity Faculty in Konya, Turkey. With a PhD in Islamic Philosophy from Selçuk University, he has dedicated over two decades to teaching and research at both institutions. His scholarship spans a wide range of topics, including classical Islamic philosophy, Sufism, Islamic theology, classical and modern Turkish thought, contemporary Islamic intellectual trends, and Persian philosophical and Sufi traditions.

His research delves into key figures and themes within Islamic thought, notably Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī's symbolic language expressing the doctrine of the Oneness of Being (*wahdat al-wujūd*), Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl's Ishraqī philosophy and its connection to the Peripatetic (*Mashshā'ī*) philosophy of Ibn Sīnā (including critiques of the latter), and Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī's critique of the philosophical concept of the pre-eternity of the world.

Professor Uluç is fluent in English, Arabic, and Persian, in addition to his native Turkish.





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## Translator's Introduction

*In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful*

Praise is due to God, who created the heavens and earth, setting in them open and secret signs indicating His unity. Peace and blessings be upon all the prophets whom God sent to lead humanity out of the darkness of deviation to the light of right guidance, in accordance with His wisdom, and especially upon our Prophet Muḥammad, as well as upon his pure household, virtuous companions and sincere followers who will come until the Day of Judgment.

Everyone experiences moments of emptiness. The finishing of one's education, the end of one's working career, the completion of a long-term and important project, the death of a very close friend or a relative, or the development of an illness that keeps one away from the hustle and bustle of life. These and the like thereof generate a feeling of emptiness, like a noisy machine that suddenly stops, plunging one into a silence with a psychological and cosmic dimension. It is especially at such critical moments that one has the opportunity, or is compelled, to think about one's individual destiny more deeply and more intensely than ever before. The waves of thought hit against the rock of life's meaning, but the line they reach is limited and definite. Yes, the human being can practice art, morality, law and even religion of a kind by clinging to the panacea of humanism. But what answer can one find, in the face of death and annihilation, to the question of where one has come from and to where is one going? To find something, one must transcend oneself. This means encountering, confronting, and eventually internalizing the notion of God.

The human being finds and needs God most within and for oneself: the horizons (*āfāq*) are important, but the core matter is the selves (*anfus*).



However, what is the most fundamental basis for the idea of God in man? In other words, when thinking about God, what does he take as a starting point? What is the most distinctive feature of God as a concept? Various answers may be given. God is omnipotent, omniscient, wise, independent, seeing, hearing, merciful, and generous. However, other beings, such as humans, also have these attributes in some manner. So, how will the difference between humanity and God be clarified and established? One may say that God is unique in all these perfect attributes. This means that God is one and unique in each of His attributes because He is one and unique in His essence. So, in a sense, unity is the most essential attribute of God.

Oneness (*tawhīd*) is not only the outermost gate of entry to Islam, but also its deepest dimension because *tawhīd*, which begins with accepting God as the only being worthy of worship, manifests itself in every aspect of existence. Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī's (d. 333/944) masterpiece, *The Book of Monotheism* (*Kitāb al-tawhīd*), the translation of which has been presented in the following pages, is perhaps the oldest work available that deals with this comprehensive understanding of *tawhīd* in Islam and traces it in all aspects of existence.

Here, I will not speak of the important position of al-Māturīdī himself and *The Book of Monotheism* in many fields of Islamic thought because there have already been many studies written on this subject. On the contrary, in this Translator's Introduction, I will content myself with calling attention to a few points that will help us to better understand and position *The Book of Monotheism* in our minds:

- 1) Al-Māturīdī's three-stage plan in *The Book of Monotheism*.
- 2) The reasons why *The Book of Monotheism* is a difficult text to read and understand.
- 3) The tools and methods I used in this translation to make the text clearer and easier to comprehend.
- 4) Some considerations on the reasons why *The Book of Monotheism* remained obscure for long centuries in the tradition of Islamic theological thought.

### 1) Al-Māturīdī's three-stage plan in *The Book of Monotheism*:

My acquaintance with *The Book of Monotheism* is relatively old. I read and studied the text seriously for the first time ten years ago. As a result, I have produced four works on the thought of al-Māturīdī. The first is a Turkish monograph entitled *İmām Mātūrīdī'nin Âlemin Ontolojik Yapısı Hakkında Filozofları Eleştirisi* (*Imām Mātūrīdī's Critique of the Philosophers on the Ontological Nature of the World*), which I completed in 2015, but was published in 2017. The second was a Turkish article that I wrote in 2016 with the title "Kitābu't-Tevhīd'in Tahkiki Neşri ve Açıklamalı Tercümesi'ne Dair Bazı Mülâhazalar (Some Remarks on the Critical Edition and Annotated Turkish Translation of the *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*)". The third is an English article entitled "Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī's Universalist Interpretation of Islam". The fourth is my recent Turkish translation of the *Kitāb al-tawhīd*: "*Kitābü't-Tevhīd: Tevhid İnancının Akli Temelleri*, which was published in 2021 by the Ketebe Press. Although I perused *The Book of Monotheism* during my studies, I must admit that the Imam's whole purpose from this work, i.e., *The Book of Monotheism* project, became clear in my mind only after I produced this translation, and upon reading it over and over again afterwards. Accordingly, I tend to reduce all al-Māturīdī's argumentations, refutations, and discussions in *The Book of Monotheism* to the following three purposes:

i) Setting forth a comprehensive understanding of the Islamic principle of *tawhīd* and criticizing the anti-*tawhīd* doctrines and groups. Al-Māturīdī, after exposing the need for a religion in the first pages of the work in the light of the theory of wisdom, launches into an epistemological discussion in which he deals with such means of knowledge as the occurring of an idea to the heart, inspiration, physiognomy, the drawing of lots, etc. Next, he delineates three valid means of knowledge, i.e., sensation, reasoning, and reports, refuting the criticisms directed against them, and establishing their validity. Then, he starts a very long discussion of whether the world is eternal or temporally generated in which he criticizes in detail the cosmological doctrines of the atheist philosophers, the Neoplatonist philosophers, including those whom he refers to as the Bāṭinīs and the Qarmatians, Aristotelian hylomorphism, and finally Dualist cosmologies, all from



the point of view of *tawhīd*. After this long and meticulous critique, he concludes that the world came into existence after it did not exist, therefore it has a creator, and that creator is one. Afterwards, he discusses the points by which all these groups stray from the principle of *tawhīd*, this time including the Jews and the Christians.

When reading such intense and detailed discussions of al-Māturīdī, the following question inevitably comes to one's mind: Did these currents of thought pose a threat to Islamic belief in the age and region of Imam al-Māturīdī? Or, if there were any such threat, was such a threat proportional to the extent of his criticism of them? In my opinion, there was no such threat, nor was al-Māturīdī's main target these non-Islamic movements. So, who was al-Māturīdī's real target and what was his real purpose?

ii) The critique of the Mu'tazila: it will not escape the reader's notice that a significant part of *The Book of Monotheism* is related to the school of the Mu'tazila in one way or another. The names of Mu'tazilī theologians such as al-Ka'bī, Ibn Shabīb and al-Nazzām are frequently mentioned in the work. The rational method used by al-Māturīdī and the method of the Mu'tazila are at least similar. The Māturīdī central concept of divine wisdom is not far from the Mu'tazila's doctrine of divine justice.

I have already said that al-Māturīdī's main target in his critique of the above-mentioned groups was the Mu'tazila. That is to say, he aims at ending the representative role of the Mu'tazila in the defense of Islamic belief by proving in such detail the existence and unity of God as the creator of the world against the non-Islamic groups in question. In other words, the ability of the *ahl al-sunna* to defend Islam against non-Islamic doctrines and groups, that is, a Sunnī apologetic tradition as strong as that of the Mu'tazila, was ready to emerge.

However, al-Māturīdī has in mind a more important and more fundamental purpose: he critiques and denounces the Mu'tazilī notion of divine attributes and the ontological nature of human acts by drawing a parallel between the Mu'tazilī position on the one hand and its atheist and Dualist counterpart on the other. To put it briefly, al-Māturīdī goes through all this trouble to relegate the Mu'tazilī doctrines to the status of the atheist and Dualist ones.



iii) In this context, the question comes to one's mind: why is al-Māturīdī so severe in his criticisms of the Mu'tazila, which seem to be too intense and too harsh to be explained on purely theological considerations. One may say that these criticisms are proportional to the Mu'tazila's theological as well as political and social influence in Transoxiana. However, I think that al-Māturīdī also does this to clarify his Sunni position and to make the line between his theological position and the Mu'tazila even clearer. In other words, al-Māturīdī excludes and marginalizes the Mu'tazila at every opportunity and on every occasion, casting them as heretics and Zindiqs. Al-Māturīdī is well aware that both the rational method he employs and the theological doctrines he adopts brought him closer to the Mu'tazila, making him look like them, or that there was a serious danger thereof. The bottom line is that the Imam tries to build a rational position for himself and for his own theological group through the criticisms that he levels at the Mu'tazila. So, the dialectical relationship of the Imam with the Mu'tazila is very similar to that between al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and the Muslim Peripatetic philosophers two centuries later. Just as al-Ghazālī criticized the philosophers on the one hand and used logic as a method in religious sciences on the other, al-Māturīdī did the same by criticizing the Mu'tazila using his own rational methods.

## 2) The reasons for the difficulty in reading and understanding *The Book of Monotheism*:

The common view of everyone who crosses paths with *The Book of Monotheism* in both the classical and the modern age is that the work is very difficult to understand. Some explanations and even speculations have been offered about the reason for this. I would like to discuss this issue systematically in some detail:

i) It is sometimes suggested that al-Māturīdī's ability to write in Arabic and his power of expression in this language is insufficient. Hence, it is stated that the first reason for the difficulty of reading and understanding *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* is that al-Māturīdī's Arabic suffered due to his mother tongue being other than Arabic, and because he did not reside in the regions where Arabic was spoken natively. As one who has perused al-Māturīdī's *Ta'wīlāt al-qur'ān* throughout and translated *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* into two different



languages, I disagree with this view. The difficulty of *Kitāb al-tawhīd* is not present in *Ta'wīlāt al-qur'ān*. On the contrary, the language of this exegetical work is quite fluent and much easier to understand. Then, if both works belong to al-Māturīdī, the textual difficulty of *The Book of Monotheism* should not be related to his Arabic writing skills in the first place.

ii) The current editions of *Kitāb al-tawhīd* have been produced from the single manuscript available. As it is known, Fathalla Kholeif published an edition of the text in 1970, and then Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammed Aruçi re-edited it in 2003. There are two more editions that I found through Google Books, but since they are essentially reprints of Fathalla Kholeif's edition, I attach no value to them, nor do I feel that I need to mention their names. Kholeif's edition contains many mistakes, and a significant number of them have been eliminated by Topaloğlu and Aruçi in their version. I would like to say that, although I followed most of Topaloğlu's and Aruçi's suggestions in my own translation, I disagreed with them in a number of contexts, preferring Kholeif's reading. There have been contexts, albeit limited, in which I disagreed with both editions, translating the text at my own discretion. I explained in the footnotes the reasons for my own preferences, which can be counted on the fingers of two hands. In conclusion, the present Arabic text of the *Kitāb al-tawhīd* is far from a perfect representation of al-Māturīdī's original composition.

iii) In my opinion, the difficulty of reading and understanding *The Book of Monotheism* is mainly due to the fact that al-Māturīdī wrote it for a select audience. This point has several subheadings:

a) The Imam always discusses issues while presupposing philosophical, theological, and historical background that the reader is expected to understand. For example, like other authors in the Islamic tradition, he does not quote Qur'anic verses in their entirety. Yet he takes this so far that he sometimes does not even mention the part of a verse on which his inference is based, presuming that his reader will know the whole Qur'an by heart and will immediately notice the relationship between the wording of the verse and the aspect of his inference. The same applies in most cases to his inferences based on hadiths. We can figure out what al-Māturīdī means by examining the verses and their contexts, since we have the full text of the Qur'an

and Hadith collections, as well as the exegetical literature. However, when he criticizes the atheist and deist philosophers, the Dualists, Christians and the Mu'tazila, the Imam assumes that the reader possesses the relevant background. He takes the topics of discussion to be known, explaining them with very terse references so as to proceed to his critique at once. Since a general reader may not have all this background, it is difficult and sometimes entirely impossible to follow al-Māturīdī's discussion. It may not be possible to fill this gap because the entirety of his sources is not available to us, nor does he mention them. Another reason that can be added to this category is that it is difficult to comprehend the Imam's quotations from his opponents because they lack context, and sometimes it is even difficult to be sure whether the speaker is the opponent or al-Māturīdī himself.

b) As a text, almost all of *The Book of Monotheism* is polemical. Al-Māturīdī always bases his own views on the critique and refutation of an opposing view. Therefore, in order to understand his thought, one needs first to understand the position of the interlocutor. However, al-Māturīdī describes the thought he criticizes very briefly, and just alludes to it in many contexts. This leaves the reader with a contextless set of quotations. This, again, is because the author assumes that his reader knows the subject and directly focuses on his critique.

c) It is as if al-Māturīdī, before writing *The Book of Monotheism*, promised himself to express the maximum possible meaning through the minimum amount of paper and ink. Yes, I am talking about the concision (*ījāz*) for which writers in Arabic are notorious. In other words, the text is written in a style that the Westerners may rightfully call "elliptic". When he makes an inference, the Imam often drops its middle stages, expecting the reader to jump through those omitted stages on his own. In many places, as the reader is trying to follow the argumentation and still waiting for the result to come, the Imam has already concluded the issue and already moved on to a new one!

d) Another reason for the short and concise expression in the third item is his tendency to use pronouns at an exaggerated level. Most of the time, finding the antecedents of the pronouns becomes very difficult. Moreover, there are numerous contexts in the text – either from the author



himself or from the copier – in which grammatical gender is not taken into account. Topaloğlu and Aruçi corrected many such mistakes. However, I disagree with them in some of these corrections and have provided alternative readings.

e) The Imam uses a single preposition or *ḥarf al-jarr* in the same sentence with two different meanings. A common example of this is his use of the preposition “*alā*” several times in the same sentence to mean both “in spite of” and as the preposition, meaning “upon”, of such verbs as “*ikhtalafa*” (to differ), “*ittafaqa*” (to agree) and “*ajma’a*” (to resolve).

f) He frequently uses *mā al-maṣdariyya* (gerundial *mā*), which is not frequent in Arabic, adding extra difficulty to the text. The Imam always uses this “*mā*” instead of the infinitive that is made by adding “*an*” to the beginning of the *al-muḍāri’* verb in common Arabic, and again instead of “*anna*”. This usage is not wrong, but uncommon. For example, if we are to say the sentence, “It makes me happy that you speak truthfully” in Arabic, there are two common forms of expression to my knowledge: “*yasurrunī an taṣduq*” or “*yasurrunī annaka ṣādiq*”. Yet al-Māturīdī will definitely express this sentence as either “*mā anta ṣādiq yasurrunī*” or “*mā taṣduq yasurrunī*”. In short, al-Māturīdī uses “*mā*” in almost all the contexts in which “*an*” and “*anna*” are used. As we have already noted, this usage is not grammatically incorrect, but not usual either. Secondly, the reader is likely to think that this “*mā*” is *mā al-nāfiya* (negatory *mā*) or *ism mawṣūl* (the relative clause) in many contexts. I should say that in many of the places where my understanding differs from Topaloğlu’s translation, the reason is this “*mā*”.

g) Again, the Imam uses the phrase “*mā min*” very often. He constantly uses this pattern to express meanings that may be expressed with a much simpler adjective-noun structure. True, this provides fluency and ease to the speaker at the phonetic level, but it puts a semantic burden on the text. One may explain this with an example: “Write down the verses of the Qur’an I read in your notebook.” The common expression of this sentence in Arabic is as follows: “*uktub al-āyāt allatī qara’tuhā fī daftarika*”. However, al-Māturīdī always expresses this, and similar sentences as follows: “*uktub mā qara’tuhu min al-āyāt fī daftarika*”. He uses this structure even to express the simplest meanings.

h) Al-Māturīdī in some places seems to deliberately drown his expressions in pronouns and leaves the issue at hand ambiguous because he is well aware that his position pushes the limits of the mainstream *ahl al-sunna* formulation of his age. The examples of this, however, are limited to two or three contexts.

i) The issues dealt with in *The Book of Monotheism* contain abstract and subtle argumentation in many places. Thus, not only the language, but also the content of the text is difficult.

**3) The tools and methods that I used to make the text clearer and easier to understand in my translation are as follows:**

i) In order to achieve a more accurate text, I compared both printed editions in each sentence.

ii) I tried to clarify all the stages that I think al-Māturīdī omitted in his argumentation in square brackets, thus making it easier to understand his inferences. In some places, I mentioned in square brackets the conclusions that were omitted by the author, the Imam probably thinking them to be obvious.

iii) I mentioned the antecedents of obscure or confusing pronouns in the work in square brackets. Identifying the antecedents of the pronouns is indeed a difficult and delicate task. Most of the contexts in which my translation differed from Topaloğlu's translation are related to determining the antecedents of the pronouns. I spent a great amount of time and energy in determining such antecedents.

iv) There is no particular way to make up for lack of the knowledge of theological background that al-Māturīdī assumes the reader possesses, because much of the literature in question has not reached us. In addition, al-Māturīdī does not even mention the titles of the books he quotes. Therefore, what one can do to overcome this difficulty is the following: al-Māturīdī discusses the same issues in more detail and more clearly in some contexts in his *Book of Monotheism* while he passes over them with abrupt and ambiguous allusions in others. So, I checked such issues in multiple contexts by cross-referencing and comparison.

v) In many contexts, I paraphrased al-Māturīdī's arguments in square brackets.



**4) The reasons why *The Book of Monotheism* remained obscure in the Islamic intellectual tradition for many centuries:**

It is interesting that *The Book of Monotheism* remained obscure in the subsequent centuries even within Hanafī-Māturīdī circles. As a reason for this, researchers generally point out the difficult style of *The Book of Monotheism* and it being an unsuitable textbook in the syllabus of madrasas. I accept that this is a reason, but not the most important one, because the difficulties of al-Māturīdī's text can be overcome by determining the antecedents of the pronouns, completing the missing links in the inferences, and explaining the less frequently used sentence structures with common ones, as I did in my translation. So, in my opinion, the real reason that *The Book of Monotheism* remained obscure at the textual level is that later Māturīdī theologians were unsure of both the method used in *The Book of Monotheism* and some of the views it contained.

After sharing these considerations, I would like to conclude my words by pointing out one last issue. The efforts of the late scholars Fathalla Kholeif, Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammed Aruçi in making the text and contents of *The Book of Monotheism* accessible are commendable. However, it is obvious that Bekir Topaloğlu's Turkish translation has a very special importance among them. I should acknowledge that I have extensively benefited from his translation when producing my own Turkish and English translation. Therefore, although I did not know him personally, I must say that I consider myself one of his students.

I hope that this translation may contribute to understanding Imam al-Māturīdī's thoughts from his own words. It would be a source of happiness for me to know that a student, a researcher, and any reader may find this text clear and be aware that I put great efforts both into understanding it and making it understandable.

I send my special thanks to Mr. Necmeddin Bilal Erdoğan, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Ibn Haldun University for generously supporting this important project and publishing it as part of the series of the Ibn Haldun University Publishing House. I am most grateful to Dr. Savaş Cihangir Tali, director and editor of the Publishing House for encouraging me to undertake the task of translation and for mediating between me and



the University administration, and for his many other roles in the realization of this project. I am also thankful to Halil İbrahim Binici and Ayşenur Alper, who share the same enthusiasm, and the other staff of the Publishing House who contributed to the creation of the work. Finally, I pray God the Almighty accepts this work as a lasting charity from everyone who contributed to the completion of this project.

Tahir Uluç  
March 3, 2022  
Meram, Konya  
Turkey

## Editor's Introduction

*In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful*

Praise is due to the Lord of the Worlds, a praise that increases without limit yet ever falls short of what is deserved by divine majesty. May blessings and peace be on the Messenger of God, Muḥammad, and on his family, companions and followers. And may God grant mercy to the Imam of Guidance, Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, and benefit us with the light of his knowledge, *āmin*.

An English translation of al-Māturīdī's *Book of Monotheism* (*Kitāb al-tawḥīd*) is a debt owed not just to the field of Islamic studies, but to the global Muslim community (*umma*), and ultimately world literature. How so? Al-Māturīdī is important first and foremost due to his status as the eponym of one of the two main schools of Sunnī *kalām*.<sup>1</sup> The Māturīdī tradition is a theological articulation of the Ḥanafī school of ethics and law, itself one of the oldest and largest such schools in the Muslim world. But al-Māturīdī also has a wider significance, reflecting the depth and subtlety of his theological and philosophical ideas, as well as the coherence of the

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1 The other major Sunnī *kalām* school is credited to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935-36), see below. Beside *The Book of Monotheism*, translated here, al-Māturīdī's extensive theologically focused commentary on the Qur'an, known as *Tā'wīlāt al-qur'ān* (*Interpretations of the Qur'an*) also survives. In it, he responds to the lost exegetical texts of important early Mu'tazilī figures, such as Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm (d. 201/816) an early compiler of theological exegesis. In contrast to *The Book of Monotheism*, al-Māturīdī's exegesis became part of the scholastic tradition as a living text. It was read and copied profusely in later centuries, as witnessed by its survival in numerous manuscripts. Though there is meaningful theological overlap between his two major works, not to mention distinctive avenues of theological exploration in his Qur'anic commentary, attention in this volume will remain on his theological summa. On the theological significance of his exegesis, see Saleh, "Re-reading al-Ṭabarī through al-Māturīdī."



resultant system. This elevates him to sit among both the great theologians of the Islamic tradition, and the great philosophers of religion. This is a big claim, but one that will, I hope, be substantiated by the remainder of this introduction and the translated work that follows.

A second question concerns the value of translating an advanced book of this kind. There are a vast number of works written in the technical Arabic register of Islamic scholarship and it is sometimes suggested that those interested in learning from them should just acquire the requisite Arabic to understand for themselves. I would suggest that though the point is well taken in the case of heavily linguistic works, it is less compelling for those of theological and philosophical value. To draw an analogy: it may be the case that scholars interpreting Aristotle's and Augustine's textual corpora need to be able to read Ancient Greek and Latin, but this is not the only scholarly audience who want to refer to the core ideas of these major philosophers. Moreover, there is a much larger readership of students and the general public who are either indebted to the intellectual impact of these figures on their societies or intrigued by the wisdom that premodern thinkers may have to offer us about the human condition.

Additionally, as already mentioned in the Translator's Introduction, it is no secret that al-Māturīdī's Arabic is peculiar and obscure, a fact not lost even on those within his tradition who sought to champion him.<sup>2</sup> One can be familiar with the nuances of theological Arabic and still struggle with his dense layering of concepts, being left unsure exactly what he is referring to and how his numerous arguments are meant to interconnect. Beyond linguistic and stylistic aspects, the most important factor in the "difficulty" of *The Book of Monotheism* is that al-Māturīdī is engaged in the rare task of trying to construct an original theological system, even if the raw materials for his endeavor came from debates in the theologically charged early centuries of Islam. Such a situation could have resulted in the development of a rich commentary literature, as was common in Late Antique and Medieval scholarship,<sup>3</sup> but in this case it did not. Al-Māturīdī's book was passed on by

2 Al-Bazdawī, "Uṣūl al-dīn," 3.

3 See van Litt, "Commentary and Commentary Tradition"; Wisnovsky, "The Nature and Scope of Arabic Philosophical Commentary in post-Classical (ca. 1100-1900 AD) Islamic Intellectual History".



the subsequent tradition bearing his name more as an heirloom than a living document. Instead, more accessible theological compendia, especially the *Tabṣīrat al-adilla* of Abū al-Muʿin al-Nasafī (d. 508/1114), became the basic source texts for the elaboration of classical Māturīdism. This means that translating *The Book of Monotheism* is like nothing so much as solving a series of interrelated textual and theological puzzles. The reader of Arabic is in need of the solutions as much as the reader of English.

The challenging nature of the task at hand can perhaps help to explain the lack of an English translation in the half-century since Fathalla Kholeif's first published edition of the Arabic text.<sup>4</sup> There has been, however, some activity in this period of time. J. Meric Pessagno worked on a full translation and commentary of the text funded by the US National Endowment for the Humanities in the 1980s, though it has not been published and perhaps should be assumed lost.<sup>5</sup> In recent years, Aladdin Yaqub, translator of al-Ghazālī's *Moderation in Belief* (*Al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād*), expressed that he was working on a translation,<sup>6</sup> and Sulaiman Ahmed self-published a non-academic translation of the first half of the text.<sup>7</sup>

Having set the context for the present work within literature in the English language, I will say some introductory words about the genesis of the present project and the nature of the collaboration between Translator and Editor. The Translator, Tahir Uluç, approached me having completed a draft of his English translation of *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, which would follow

4 Since 2002, the Turkish translation of Bekir Topaloğlu, the editor (with Muhammad Aruci) of the revised Arabic edition of *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, has been available and along with other factors has resulted in a massive increase in scholarship on al-Māturīdī within Turkey. See Dorroll, *Islamic Theology in the Turkish Republic*, 67-68.

5 See Pessagno, "Irāda, Ikhtiyār, Qudra, Kasb," 177.

6 <https://www2.lehigh.edu/news/a-journey-into-the-proof-of-islam>. Accessed 20 June 2023. A 2015 publication in Brigham Young University Press' well-known Islamic Translation Series is mentioned in the article. This series has been taken over by Brill and the status of Yaqub's project is unclear.

7 Al-Māturīdī, *The Book of Monotheism*, trans. Sulaiman Ahmed. This translation does not follow usual academic conventions and betrays a lack of awareness of the contemporary literature on al-Māturīdī and early *kalām*, including the recent Arabic edition of Topaloğlu and Aruci, which has superseded that of Kholeif. Though some of Ahmed's translations of al-Māturīdī's text and his explanatory comments are sound, there is a consistent failure to grasp the specifics of his theological method and hence the result is not a reliable rendering of the work.



his 2021 Turkish translation of the text. He was aware of my acute interest in al-Māturīdī as witnessed in my book *Transcendent God, Rational World: A Māturīdī Theology*, which had been published in the same year by Edinburgh University Press and had included translations from and constructive application of *The Book of Monotheism*. The Translator invited me to contribute to his project both through my insight into al-Māturīdī's theological ideas and my editorial skills as a native English speaker. What struck me from my first read of an extract of the translation was the fluent way that the Translator was able to express al-Māturīdī's tricky syntax in the English language. In working with this text, I initially set myself two main goals: to make sure that the translation strikes the best possible balance of fidelity to its Arabic source and to clear, idiomatic English; and to provide sufficient annotation so that the intricate argumentation within the text can be understood by the reader, including its theological context and internal progression of ideas. What quickly became apparent was that line-by-line immersion in *The Book of Monotheism* with the translation as a companion made me more deeply attuned to al-Māturīdī's thought than ever before and enhanced my own understanding of his system. The effort to make this most enigmatic of texts understandable to the reader in English, while remaining faithful to the ideas of its author in Arabic, opened for me a new perspective on the internal logic of al-Māturīdī's theological dialectic. This vision, as well as forming the basis for annotation, fed back recursively into my editorial work on the translation. I have been truly blessed, then, not only to be able to build on the achievements of the Translator, but to have been trusted to take the text in the direction that I have understood as closest to al-Māturīdī's own intent. The result has been a very fruitful collaboration.

In the sections to come, I will follow the lead of the Translator in his introduction by mainly focusing on *The Book of Monotheism* rather than its author. This also reflects the simple fact that we do not have very much detail at all about the life of al-Māturīdī.<sup>8</sup> His milieu of fourth/tenth-century

<sup>8</sup> For the available information, see Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 125-47; Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 17-61; Al-Damanhūrī, *Sadd al-thughūr bi-sīrat 'alam al-hudā Abī Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī*. Certain points can be usefully supplemented by Dorroll, "The Universe in Flux," 120-25.



Samarqand was clearly possessed of some intellectual resources in the fields of Arabic philosophy and theology, and was something of a melting pot of different views.<sup>9</sup> He belonged to an established Hanafi tradition within Samarqand with its own, albeit underdeveloped, theological lineage deriving principally from Transoxianan-based students of Abū Ḥanifa (d. 150/767).<sup>10</sup> As argued in the Translator's Introduction, al-Māturīdī's attention as a member of the established Hanafi tradition within Samarqand was drawn to the threat posed by the strain of "Baghdadi" Mu'tazilism represented by Abū al-Qāsim al-Ka'bi (al-Balkhī) (d. 319/931). The result was that al-Māturīdī frequently tries to show how the views of the Mu'tazila align with or even exceed the heretical views of other groups, especially dualists and atheistic Dahrīs (Eternalists). This is not to claim that there was no live trace at all of these other perspectives in his time, but it is an important emphasis to bear in mind when considering the way that al-Māturīdī positions his *kalām* within his context.

Moreover, as shown by Ulrich Rudolph, various parts of *The Book of Monotheism* can be classified in relation to clusters of preceding theological ideas, especially those of the Mu'tazila, with which al-Māturīdī grapples.<sup>11</sup> In a few cases, he presents and comments upon a specific written tradition at length. This is most noticeable in relation to three figures: al-Ka'bi on questions relating to the divine attributes, divine and human action, and major sin in 2.12, 6.3.2 to 6.17, and 7.3 (according to the numbering adopted in the translation); Muḥammad b. Shabīb (d. third/ninth century) on God and the world in 4.5 and 4.7; and Ibn al-Warrāq (d. 247/861) on the Qur'an, which he attacked as a proof for the messengerhood of the Prophet Muḥammad, in 5.3 and 5.4.

Another point of context that I see as significant, and that has not hitherto received detailed study, is a strand of thought that links al-Māturīdī to ideas within the circle of the early Muslim philosopher Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī (d. ca 259/873), likely through the activities of Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (d. 322/934). There are several places in *The Book of Monotheism* where

9 Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 149-50, 170-74, 178.

10 See Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 147.

11 Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 229-30.



a passage that is otherwise difficult to understand comes into focus when read through a Kindian lens.<sup>12</sup>

In locating al-Māturīdī's theological identity it is important to consider that he had no idea that his name would later be taken along with Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī – a figure of whom he was not aware – as founders of a shared Sunnī orthodoxy.<sup>13</sup> In fact, it seems that al-Māturīdī preceded by a generation the adoption of the identitarian term *ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā'a* within his local context, though he is clearly in broad agreement on many doctrinal questions with those who were already using the name.<sup>14</sup> Rather, when referring to those upholding correct doctrine vis-à-vis his main "internal" rivals, the Mu'tazila, he refers to the People of Monotheism (*ahl al-tawhīd*) or just "the Muslims", terms that express his intent to claim a majoritarian status for his theological positions. The choice of this expression likely reflects a polemical effort to combat the moniker of People of Monotheism and Justice (*ahl al-tawhīd wa-l-'adl*) adopted by Mu'tazilīs such as al-Ka'bī.<sup>15</sup>

In the later centuries of Māturīdism and up until today, one of the ways that al-Māturīdī's truly fascinating thought has been obscured is the tendency to assimilate it in one of two directions: either back to his predecessor Abū Ḥanīfa by downplaying his philosophical contributions, or forward to his successors in the classical and postclassical era by reading it through the lens of the post-Avicennan Ash'arī-Māturīdī synthesis.<sup>16</sup> The best scholarship on al-Māturīdī to emerge in recent years in my opinion has avoided these two poles and has instead sought to clarify his ideas on their own terms. This principle, upon which the Translator and Editor of the present book are in complete accord, has been a guiding star for this project.

12 See 2.1.2 (5); 2.2.1.4 (1); 2.7 (5) ii a-d.

13 Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand*, 7-10.

14 For the situation in the next generation, see Harvey, "The Case of the Missing Disciple," 121. For more general comments of the term as a signifier of Sunnī identity, see Nawas, "The Appellation 'Ṣāhib Sunna' in Classical Islam."

15 See, for example, al-Balkhī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt*, 245.

16 For a streamlined summary of the classical shaping of core elements of Māturīdī *kalām* by Ash'arī ideas, see Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, 225-28. On the significance of the impact of Avicennan ideas on Islamic theology, see Wisnovsky, "One Aspect of the Avicennian Turn in Sunnī Theology".

The remaining parts of this Editor's Introduction are structured as follows:

1) A discussion of the progression of core themes within *The Book of Monotheism* highlighting areas of particular interest, including an explanation for those who may be accessing this translation without prior knowledge of the structure of *kalām* manuals.

2) Treatment of a notable "missing" theme within al-Māturīdī's systematic presentation of the text: his physical ontology.

3) An exploration of *The Book of Monotheism's* formal structural features, at the macro and micro level, important adjustments made to the chapter structure introduced by the two existing editions of the Arabic text, and explanation of the section numbering adopted in this translation.

4) A discussion of the principles adopted in the editing and annotation of the present translation, providing both an insight into the work undertaken by the Editor, and supporting the reader who wants to understand better the technical aspects of this translation and its relation to the Arabic source text.

#### 1) Progression of Core Themes within *The Book of Monotheism*:

One who takes the time to carefully work through *The Book of Monotheism* as a single linear treatise comes to appreciate the systematicity of the text as a theological production. The author is acutely aware of his intellectual milieu and audience as one in which the method of *kalām* as an Arabic genre of discourse had increasingly become a common language of theological contestation, not just among the various groups of Muslims but a much wider set of interlocutors, including Naturalists, Buddhists, Zoroastrians and other kinds of dualists, as well as the Abrahamic monotheism of Judaism and Christianity.<sup>17</sup> Al-Māturīdī is thus very aware that he is embarking on a dialectical inquiry that engages diverse participants and that he cannot assume his own strongly held Islamic and "Samarqandī Ḥanafī" convictions within the justificatory arguments that he will propose. *The Book of Monotheism*, then, operates under what can be called a mode of "public reason", though the scope of argumentative resources, especially those which

17 See Sahner, *The Definitive Zoroastrian Critique of Islam*, 64-71.



al-Māturīdī organizes under the master headings of reason ('*aql*') and tradition (*ṣam'*), differs according to the specific polemical context of any given enquiry. To understand al-Māturīdī's arguments – and it is only through his arguments that one can appreciate his theological positions – one must always hold in mind whom he is in dialogue with, the points upon which him and his opponent agree, and those upon which he is seeking to prove his interlocutor's falsity and inconsistency.

Is then al-Māturīdī, as some subsequent philosophers and theologians declared about early *kalām* in general, merely embroiled in a dogmatic exercise of dialectics, rather than a systematic, scientific demonstration about the reality of the world? Providing a full answer to this question would itself involve entering a nuanced ongoing debate on the proper purpose and method of Islamic theology and its relationship to philosophy. What I think is useful in the present context is to try to outline what it seems is al-Māturīdī's own position on the matter. This is especially apposite because it is at this level of strikingly self-aware questioning that he begins *The Book of Monotheism*.

i) Al-Māturīdī's Introduction is a short, yet thoughtful and original piece of writing on what we would today label as philosophy of religion. Working at a high level of abstraction, he sets out the basic problem that his book will tackle. People in his era, as in other times, were divided in their beliefs, each taking different traditional authorities as possessing the truth. How then are they to distinguish the true religious teachings from the false? Al-Māturīdī is aware that he cannot presuppose his own tradition as correct, as his interlocutor can do the same. Yet that does not mean that al-Māturīdī is ready to divest himself of his religious tradition, even for the sake of argument. It provides useful resources to support his investigations if it can be verified, and it may be shared to a greater or lesser degree by his opponents, thus providing a common basis for discussion. Most importantly, al-Māturīdī reiterates that no one can avoid belonging to one tradition or another, and that this fundamental reality of human social and intellectual existence is always of significance when structuring any kind of investigation into contested religious truth. Everyone always works from the vantage point of a certain worldview with a distinctively shaped set of beliefs. This insight provides a key to unlock why, within the framework of his thought, there is no way to search for truth between competing



religious traditions except through a shared dialectical inquiry. There is no neutral platform upon which everyone may stand to conduct debate. Rather, each must start from their own position, while necessarily remaining careful not to adduce a conflicting traditional authority as the basis for justificatory arguments. The main cut and thrust of debate, then, returns to the operation of public reason to justify one's own beliefs.

The human being's intellect, or reason (al-Māturīdī uses the word 'aql both in more substantial and active senses) allows a path through the maze of competing traditions towards the truth at its center precisely because it is a common faculty. What a member of a tradition needs is "rational evidence confirming his claims and a proof that compels the fair-minded to acknowledge that he has reached the truth." The qualifier "fair-minded" (*al-munṣifin*) underscores that al-Māturīdī is all too cognizant that the reality of religious debate is not one in which everyone will behave as a perfect rational agent. Nevertheless, the best that one can hope for is to present arguments that, based on the terms in which they are given and the reason available to one's opponent, can in principle convince them. Another question that may be raised is the identity of the person who ought to put forward rational claims to support their tradition-grounded beliefs. Interestingly, al-Māturīdī leaves this point ambiguous. This is important in realizing his objective of placing public reason as the deciding factor between rival viewpoints. All who enter the arena should accept themselves as bound by the rule of reason and acknowledge that they are not guaranteed to convince their opponents. At the same time, al-Māturīdī drops hints that he is thinking about the messenger of a given era, in his case the Prophet Muḥammad, and by extension those, such as himself, who continue his legacy in terms of rational argumentation for the truth.

If the first part of al-Māturīdī's introduction sets out the basic terms on which religious differences are to be intellectually resolved, the remainder provides a wider social and cosmological context by which he preludes key themes to come within *The Book of Monotheism*. Al-Māturīdī uses human reason to introduce a tension that will characterize some of his most insightful and unique theological contributions in the remainder of the text. Through our intellects, human beings are witnesses to a fundamental intelligibility in the world: it makes sense to us. In fact, the very possession of



reason signals that this intelligibility cuts deep into the fabric of reality. Yet this epistemological insight directs us to the ontological question of the nature of the reality that allows rational beings to exist in the first place. Here, al-Māturīdī points to an intriguing observation, which he expands upon at much greater length in his book proper: the world, both in its constituent elements and its wider social arrangement, is filled with contrary forces that dynamically interact causing conflict and harm, as well as harmony and benefit. Yet such conflict does not result in the complete annihilation of the world, but instead occurs alongside the continued existence of the rational beings who observe this phenomenon. Hence, this allows the rational agent to infer the existence of a wise governor (*mudabbir*), God, who deserves to be known and worshipped. The existence of God, then, explains the consistency, continuance, and meaningfulness of the world. At the social level, the religion brought by God to the people by someone "singled out for their leadership", in other words a messenger, provides the stability needed for society to persist and the guidance needed for human beings to survive and flourish, here and Hereafter. In other words, the acquisition of universal truths is one part of the comprehensive human flourishing that religion makes possible.

ii) Turning to his Enquiries of Epistemology, al-Māturīdī provides further details about the terms on which his dialectical investigations can proceed. His treatment, unlike his metaepistemological introduction, became paradigmatic for subsequent writing within his theological tradition. At its core is a distinction between the invalid approach to knowledge acquisition, as practiced by sophists and those with flawed means of knowledge, and the three valid means of sensation, reports and reflection.

The sophists, who deny one or more of these valid means, are taken to be obstinate people who deserve to be ignored. They are rejected due to their incoherence and lack of seriousness in undertaking intellectual investigation. In terms of the erroneous adoption of an additional means of knowledge, al-Māturīdī first criticizes "intuition" (*mā yaqa'u fī qalb*) and "inspiration" (*ilhām*).<sup>18</sup> It is important to remember that his objective in discussing these epistemic means is to assess their suitability for his project

18 1.1.

of public reason. His rejection of them is not absolute: someone may have a true intuition or divine inspiration, but that fact is fundamentally hidden from mutual investigation and scrutiny and so carries no weight in this context. In fact, he goes further to imply that dissension over such "hidden truths" can contribute to the social destruction resulting from irreconcilable religious disagreement. The exception, of course, is the valid source of prophetic inspiration, specifically revelation, which al-Māturīdī deals with under reports. The acceptability of the essentially private experience of revelation relies on the messenger's infallibility (*'iṣma*), which is vouchsafed by the rational validation of a phenomenon outside of the normal natures of things – a miracle.<sup>19</sup> Even then, unless the messenger's deliverances are captured in mass-transmitted reports, the knowledge passed on for later generations is not considered binding in terms of belief.<sup>20</sup> The other two invalid means that attract al-Māturīdī's ire, though publicly verifiable, lack a genuine connection to their objects: drawing lots and physiognomy. What is required is truthful insight into the nature of reality, and that requires careful reflection by the intellect. Though the basic phenomena detected by the senses and the transmission of religious tradition through reports, especially the Qur'an, play an important role in *The Book of Monotheism*, the key debates return time and again to the deliberations of reason. It provides, as al-Māturīdī suggests, a final integrative function by which the other valid means are put in their proper places and, especially in his detailed arguments about specific religious beliefs, such as those relating to the unseen world, the only way to vindicate his own interpretations as the truth.<sup>21</sup>

iii) As is the case for *kalām* manuals in general, *Enquiries of Divinity* is the heart of *The Book of Monotheism*. It is here that al-Māturīdī establishes his theological method and applies it to argue for the existence and correct characterization of God. This conception is then followed consistently to develop subsequent themes throughout the remainder of the book. It is important to remark that in contrast to his careful presentation of epistemology, al-Māturīdī does not overtly set out his physical ontology (see section 2 below). Rather than starting off with ontological clarifications, al-Māturīdī

19 1.2.3 (2-3); 5.1 (5).

20 1.2.2.1.

21 1.2.3 (8).



begins this chapter with a series of arguments centered on the temporal generation of the world. The main targets of his treatment are Dahrīs who thought that the existence of diverse material elements within the world could be explained by an infinite regress of yet more matter without requiring a creator to bring the world into existence from nothing. Al-Māturīdī provides numerous arguments to respond to this broadly conceived group. His initial objective is to show that such a past infinity is impossible, and that the world had an absolute first moment of existence.<sup>22</sup> Subsequently, he argues that despite the shared observation with the Dahrīs that the world contains contrary natures with mutual causal effects, the persistence of the world as we see it requires an external agent who is entirely outside of such contingent and temporal activity, and that this agent must be singular.<sup>23</sup> There is, thus, in the writing of al-Māturīdī a number of interesting and in some cases original arguments of natural theology, which establish that God must possess attributes, such as knowledge, wisdom and will.

The dispute with the Dahrīs also opens another significant theme, the application of the specific inference of “the indication from the visible world to the unseen”. The Dahrī idea of an eternal regress of matter is based on a positive analogy: the world we see is based on more of the same without end.<sup>24</sup> Though al-Māturīdī accepts that there are cases where this kind of analogy can be of some use, he thinks his opponents go wrong both in its application here,<sup>25</sup> and in their broader rejection of a negative or contrastive inference. They utterly fail to see that, even in the world, the move from an effect to its cause is not just the search for exactly the same phenomenon. In the context of ultimate explanation, the failure to draw a contrastive and ultimately transcendent inference, leads the Dahrīs to no kind of explanation at all.<sup>26</sup>

After further characterization and critique of different models of the eternal world: atheistic, broadly monotheistic (i.e., the emanation of the

22 2.1.

23 2.2.

24 2.3.

25 He later argues that even on the basis of an inference to something similar, what we observe is a temporal world, requiring the world in its entirety to be the same. See 2.5.1 (4).

26 2.3 (3) iv-viii.

*falāsifa*) and dualist,<sup>27</sup> al-Māturīdī begins to tackle his theme of the divine nature by negating any accidental or bodily qualities to God while retaining the acceptability of classifying him as a "thing".<sup>28</sup> The purpose of this gambit is that, whereas similarity with the creation – let alone anthropomorphism – is unacceptable given his contrastive inference, God's existence must be affirmed and so must distinct attributes as the ground for predicative statements about Him. Here, positive analogy is allowed back in so long as it is tightly controlled by the negation of the whatness (*mā'iyya*, often known as *māhiyya*) of created things.<sup>29</sup> As told to us by both tradition, including the language of scripture, and reason through natural theology, God has distinct attributes that constitute his "essence" or "essential nature" (*dhāt*),<sup>30</sup> of which we can describe their functions by analogy with the visible world. Al-Māturīdī writes: "If we could name Him by something by which no one else has been named, we would do that. But since the visible world is His evidence and that through which He needs to be known, His name is assessed from it in a way that brings [the meaning] that He intends closer to the intellect, even though He is exalted above having a similar or a likeness."<sup>31</sup> This leads to the adoption of statements such as "God is the Knower, but not like other knowers."<sup>32</sup> About this method, which he opposes to those who attempt to nullify distinct attributes to God, he comments, "Thus monotheism, as I have explained, becomes affirmation of an essence through negation and negation through affirmation."<sup>33</sup>

Al-Māturīdī uses these core ideas to deal with major theological themes in this chapter, including a detailed polemical exchange with his Mu'tazilī rival al-Ka'bī on the essential and active attributes, and divine speech. He strongly emphasizes that all of God's actions, including His existentiatio (*takwīn*) of the world, are essential.<sup>34</sup> That means, for him, that God possesses His complete set of attributes and acts in His timeless

27 2.4; 2.5.

28 2.6; 2.7.

29 2.7.

30 See the remarks under 2 (i) in this Editor's Introduction.

31 2.19 (1).

32 2.2.1.5.

33 2.19 (1). For reflection on this fundamental aspect of al-Māturīdī's theological method, see Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, 59-61, 73-77.

34 2.12.



and placeless existence from which He creates everything that exists in its proper spatiotemporal locus.<sup>35</sup> This theological perspective provides al-Māturīdī with resources to deal with significant disputed doctrines, especially the understanding of God's "establishment upon the Throne" (*al-istiwā' 'alā al-'arsh*), which becomes a case study on the ambiguous verses (*mutashābihāt*), and like the question of the relationship between God and His attributes, ultimately provokes the suspension of judgment (*waqf*).<sup>36</sup> This theologically cautious aspect of al-Māturīdī's rational orientation is significant and should not be downplayed. From the Throne, he attends to the Beatific Vision (*ru'ya*), which he endorses as a reality for believers in the Hereafter.<sup>37</sup> A central theological argument here is that only accidents, not entities, are invisible on essential grounds.<sup>38</sup>

A further feature of this latter part of the chapter is an ongoing fascination with divine creation of the world from his own model vis-à-vis that of his various interlocutors, and especially condemnation of the errors into which the superficially similar views of the Mu'tazila fall foul. A notable Mu'tazili doctrine that al-Māturīdī rejects in this context is that of the "thingness of the non-existent" (*shay'īyyat al-ma'dūm*). This, he thinks, like other Mu'tazili views, is destructive of monotheism, as it leads to consequences associated with the Dahrīs and the Dualists.<sup>39</sup> These discussions prefigure themes that he returns to throughout the remainder of the book, especially in Chapter 4.

iv) Enquiries of Divine Wisdom is a relatively short and self-contained chapter that focuses on the theodical considerations that typically follow discussion of the divine attributes within works of *kalām*. While the idea of God as omniscient and wise as an explanation for the particular characteristics observed in the visible world is established from early in the book, further reflection on the scope of God's absolute wisdom, and human understanding thereof, becomes the main focus of the first two and final sections and is contrasted with the Mu'tazili idea that God must do what is

35 2.11.

36 2.16 (6); 2.12.3 (8).

37 2.17.

38 2.17 (10) vi.

39 2.18 (1-3).

"most beneficial" (*aṣlah*) for human worldly and eschatological good.<sup>40</sup> Al-Māturīdī presents his approach as taking much better account of the interplay of various benefits and harms within the world, invoking the complex way that this reflects the human condition as it grapples with its place vis-à-vis a divine purpose that can be known by us only partially. That this chapter might have at some time existed as a piece of writing separated from the rest of the book is supported by the invocation of the divine name (*basmala*) and the presence of some short sections in the middle of the chapter that focus on negating contingent aspects of the world from God and would have made sense to have been incorporated into Chapter 2.<sup>41</sup>

v) The fourth chapter, Enquiries of Heresiography, also has the marks of a single composition, though it is coherently placed given the thematic progression hitherto. The author begins not with a *basmala* but praise of God (*ḥamd*) and sets up the problem of the origin of the world according to various groups. The core idea, which is mostly maintained throughout the chapter, is to both present the opposing groups' doctrines at some length and to respond critically given the theological system that he has already developed. In some respects, then, this chapter is akin to a small heresiographical work (*maqālāt*) within the pages of *The Book of Monotheism*. Along with the usual suspects, this chapter also features some discussion of groups that get little or no explicit attention elsewhere, such as the Sumanīs (Buddhists),<sup>42</sup> and a number of dualist religions including the Manichaeans.<sup>43</sup> A related but slightly different approach is taken in two sections presenting and commenting on the doctrines of the Mu'tazilī Ibn Shabīb, first on God's existence and creation of the world, and second on the temporality of bodies.<sup>44</sup> There is a sense in these treatments that al-Māturīdī is interested in building upon and correcting the ideas of Ibn Shabīb, rather than merely refuting them.<sup>45</sup>

40 3.1; 3.2; 3.7.

41 3.3; 3.5; 3.6.

42 4.9. This can also be read as Samanīs.

43 4.11-4.14. For discussion of how Muslim theologians discussed other religions and philosophies, see Waardenburg, *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions*.

44 4.5; 4.7.

45 See Pessagno, "The Reconstruction of the Thought of Muḥammad Ibn Shabīb," 453.



vi) Enquiries of Messengerhood represents an important division in the content of *The Book of Monotheism*.<sup>46</sup> The thematic shift from discussion of God to His sending of messengers reflects nothing less than the testification of belief (*shahāda*) itself. Al-Māturīdī builds up his argument about messengers in a careful way that, much like his approach to establishing the existence of a creator, pays close attention to the positions of his different interlocutors. There are those who deny the creator and thus cannot get started on the concept of messengerhood at all; those who acknowledge Him but are ignorant of His commands and prohibitions; those who accept the idea of the command and prohibition but think that reason obviates the need for messengerhood; as well as skeptics who complain about the miracles that the messengers bring, comparing them to various kinds of trickery.<sup>47</sup> Al-Māturīdī has an answer prepared for each of these opponents with the general tenor of his treatment being that once reason delivers human beings to the existence of an omniscient and wise creator, then it further reveals the necessity for Him to send messengers to guide humanity. In this chapter, then, al-Māturīdī reconnects with the ideas of political theology that animate the second half of his introduction. Messengers fulfill an essential role within human society as leaders, and not only bring religious guidance but also worldly knowledge, such as informing about the harmful and beneficial natures of various plants. They prove their truth by their special natures, which allows them to perform signs (i.e., miracles) that would otherwise be entirely out of their reach, combined with their utter trustworthiness as established by their own communities.<sup>48</sup>

The remainder of the chapter circles two themes: first, close attention is paid to the miracles brought by the Prophet Muḥammad, which are numerous and wide ranging, with a focus on defending the Prophet and his miracle of the Qur'an from the critique of Ibn al-Warrāq.<sup>49</sup> In this, there is a notable appreciation of the responses made to him by Ibn al-Rāwandī (d. 245/860). This is interesting because the latter figure is often treated as a "heretic" (*mulhid*). As shown by van Ess, it seems that this image was forged in the

46 Note that this is the point at which Topaloglu and Aruḥi ended their single long chapter on divinity. See (3) in this Introduction.

47 5.1.

48 5.1 (5).

49 5.2-5.5.

wake of a falling out with the Baghdadi Mu'tazila whom Ibn al-Rāwandī abandoned and sought to refute.<sup>50</sup> Abū al-Husayn al-Khayyāt (d. ca 300/913), a major Mu'tazili figure involved in the dispute, was of course the most prominent teacher of al-Ka'bi. Hence, at least based on the material present in *The Book of Monotheism*, it seems that al-Māturīdī was able to find common cause with Ibn al-Rāwandī. Second, towards the end of the chapter there is a shift of attention to those who deny some of the messengers, which is al-Māturīdī's way of framing other theistic religions, such as Judaism and Christianity.<sup>51</sup> Interlocutors from these traditions are charged with inconsistency in accepting the miracles and messengerhood of their own prophets but not that of Islam. The chapter ends with a critique of ideas of Christology, which represents by far the longest sustained engagement with Christianity within the book, though it is still tightly circumscribed in its theological scope.<sup>52</sup>

vii) Enquiries of Divine and Human Action is the single longest chapter in *The Book of Monotheism* according to the chapter arrangement adopted in this translation. This reflects the significance of this topic as a major battlefield for al-Māturīdī's polemics with the Mu'tazila, and in particular al-Ka'bi, as well as its dense, technical nature. The chapter opens with a short discussion of God's action according to al-Māturīdī's concept of divine wisdom in light of the "Baghdadi" Mu'tazili alternative. This mainly recaps ideas already expressed in the preceding chapters. Thereafter, the human level of action comes into the foreground, though God for al-Māturīdī retains a crucial theological role as the creator of every human act. Curiously, it is the first section to discuss human action that begins with the final *ḥamd* of *The Book of Monotheism*, rather than the start of this chapter proper. This can be explained by the fact that this is the bridge between the "new" *kalām* approach, focused on the divine nature and creation, that al-Māturīdī articulates in the majority of *The Book of Monotheism* and the "old" Ḥanafī theological tradition focused on questions of human action and sin that he places at its end.<sup>53</sup>

50 Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, Vol 4, 335-38. For an exhaustive analysis of the materials and possible interpretations of Ibn al-Rāwandī's life and theological affiliations, see 333-392.

51 5.6.

52 5.7-5.8.

53 See Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand*, 216-17.



Al-Māturīdī explores three main approaches to articulating the relationship between divine creation and human free will.<sup>54</sup> A determinist option, which denies the reality of the human act, is quickly dismissed. That leaves, again, the main field of contestation between a Mu'tazilī theory that seeks to carve out a theological space for entirely autonomous human action, and his own one that preserves complementary roles for God and the human being. Al-Māturīdī makes an extensive case that centers his idea of free choice (*ikhtiyār*), the instantaneous – and causally efficacious – realization of one action rather than another, while retaining God as the sole creator of everything from nothing. His aim is to safeguard both human responsibility to the commands of the Law and divine omnipotence. Interestingly, he repeatedly seeks to show that not only does the Mu'tazilī model fall into grave problems with the latter aspect, but that it also does not allow for a coherent expression of the former one. That is, he argues that the Mu'tazila fail on their own terms to vouchsafe for the human being the very free will that is supposedly a defining feature of their theology. In the remainder of the chapter, al-Māturīdī composes extensive back-and-forth debates with al-Ka'bī on the core conceptualization of the problem,<sup>55</sup> sub-issues, such as the kinds of power and capacity,<sup>56</sup> and the time frame in which actions are to occur,<sup>57</sup> as well as secondary applications, such as with respect to the "Decree and Determination" (*al-qadā' wa-l-qadar*).<sup>58</sup> Finally, al-Māturīdī renews his wider attack on the Mu'tazila by explicitly teasing out their identification with the heavily criticized sect of the Qadarīs.<sup>59</sup>

viii) The placement of Enquiries of Major Sin and the Religious Status of Major Sinners, coherently follows the discussion of human action. It is only once free will and responsibility to the Law has been theologically articulated that it is possible to discuss the eschatological result for human beings. Again, the dialectical focus of al-Māturīdī becomes clear in his relentless rebuttal of the doctrine that a Muslim major sinner who dies without repentance is to be eternally punished in Hell. This was one

<sup>54</sup> 6.3.

<sup>55</sup> 6.3.2.

<sup>56</sup> 6.5.

<sup>57</sup> 6.6.

<sup>58</sup> 6.14.

<sup>59</sup> 6.16-6.18.

of the earliest theological questions to convulse the Muslim polity, due to the challenge posed by the Khawārij, and it was continued by the Mu'tazila according to their doctrine of the threat (*al-wa'id*). Al-Māturīdī's treatment of this theme is complex and interweaves exegesis of scripture and the practice of the early community with considerations of rational consistency. An important line of argument is that the "intermediate state" (*al-manzila bayn al-manzilatayn*), a venerable Mu'tazilī principle that declares the major sinner loses the right to be named a "believer", is a baseless invention that does not reflect the basic schema of belief, disbelief and hypocrisy established by God in the Qur'an.<sup>60</sup> In a final discussion within the chapter, al-Māturīdī defends the related doctrine of intercession for the major sinner against the claims of his Mu'tazilī interlocutors.<sup>61</sup>

ix) The closing chapter of *The Book of Monotheism* is Enquiries of Belief and Islam and, like the chapter prior to it, deals with early debates that sought to settle the definition of belief and its application to members of the community. Here, al-Māturīdī notably defends the position that belief is defined as assent (*taṣdīq*), which is not mere knowledge but an action that occurs in the heart yet does not need to be expressed by either verbal profession or acts of obedience.<sup>62</sup> Al-Māturīdī also returns to the theme of political theology that is interwoven within *The Book of Monotheism* at crucial junctures. He points out that though the presence of belief or disbelief in the heart is known only to God, the outward expression must be taken as determinative for the social order. Moreover, it reflects a profound wisdom that people may, based on their word alone, enter the Muslim community, learn and ultimately believe its truths.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, in a revealing section discussing the question of deferring judgment on the status of the major sinner (*al-irjā'*), al-Māturīdī shows that he sees such "deferral" as a theological tool, essentially equivalent to "suspending judgment" (*waqf*),<sup>64</sup> and its appropriateness depends on the case at hand. The Mu'tazila erred by deferring judgment on calling a major sinner

60 7.3 (11). See also 7.5.

61 7.6.

62 8.1; 8.2.

63 8.1 (1) i d.

64 See Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 46, 177, n. 28.



a believer, despite this being definitively known, whereas they should have done so on whether such a person would be forgiven or punished (albeit not forever).<sup>65</sup> When considered alongside other aspects of his thought, it becomes clear that beyond facile labels, al-Māturīdī constructs a unique and sophisticated theological method from the legacy of epistemic caution bequeathed by the Samarqandī successors to Abū Ḥanīfa. Tradition and reason are taken as far as they can go in classifying and categorizing reality, but these very sources reveal an inevitable gulf between the results of that process and the all-encompassing wisdom of God. Thus, one must affirm what has been established, for indeed it is true and real. But, in this life at least, beyond that one cannot tread.

## 2) Physical Ontology in *The Book of Monotheism*

It is not clear why al-Māturīdī failed to explicitly outline his physical ontology within the framework of his otherwise comprehensive text. Given his theological method, which moves from observation of the visible world to infer about the unseen, especially God, an appreciation of his approach to the constituents of the world is crucial to following his arguments. In fact, it may not be an exaggeration to suggest that one of the factors inhibiting a full reception of his theological system in later centuries was either a lack of understanding about his ontology or, perhaps, concerns over its content. Al-Māturīdī's ideas in this area have been singled out for attention by several contemporary authors who have drawn varying conclusions.<sup>66</sup> His lack of systematic presentation, and hence the absence of a central focus for the discussion, has led to the grounding of arguments on a selection of passages from *The Book of Monotheism* rather than a complete overview of the text.

One of the advantages of the present project has been the opportunity to work through the entirety of the book and to encounter each ontological reference in the precise context of its theological use. This has allowed an overall understanding of his views to come into focus, which I will outline here. Detailed references to the places in this translation of *The Book of*

<sup>65</sup> 8.3.

<sup>66</sup> See the following treatments: Frank, "Notes and Remarks on *ṭabā'i* in the Teaching of al-Māturīdī"; Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 242-62; Bulgen, "Al-Māturīdī and Atomism"; Muhtaroglu, "Al-Māturīdī's View of Causality"; Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, 89-93.



*Monotheism* where various ontological themes are broached will allow the reader to follow up on the application of al-Māturīdī's concepts as well as to read the additional annotation made upon them. Despite my conviction that the picture presented here is accurate, it is of course an interpretive exercise with the possibility of adjustment through careful argument. My intention in what follows, then, is not to provide an exhaustive philological treatment but rather an accessible and consistent reading of the rationale underlying al-Māturīdī's understanding of the constituents of the created world, and what can then be expected within the pages of *The Book of Monotheism*. This is, therefore, a philosophical analysis of his views, though one grounded in the detail of his text.

i) An entry point into al-Māturīdī's conceptualization is to consider some basic questions that an ontology seeks to answer. According to al-Māturīdī's epistemological procedures, one uses the senses and reflective reason to consider phenomenal reality in terms of the following questions: what kinds of things are there? And what do these things do?

A very first presumption, drawn from the experience of things (*al-ashy-ā'*), or entities (*a'yān*), within our experience is that they are existent (*mawjūd*) and not non-existent (*ma'dūm*).<sup>67</sup> For al-Māturīdī, the existence (*wujūd*), isness (*hastiyya*) or thingness (*shay'iyya*) of something is just the fact that it exists and so is only conceptually distinct from the thing itself (*nafs*),<sup>68</sup> or its essence (*dhāt*): the "essential nature" of an entity.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, when

67 2.1; 2.1.2 (4); 2.1.3 (3) i; 2.19 (1).

68 2.7 (5) i b I; 4.5 (15).

69 2.7 (5) i-ii; 2.12.2 (7); 2.15 (3); 2.16 (3); 2.19 (1); 4.2 (2). Frank glosses *dhāt* in the following ways: "thing-itself", "self (of the thing) ...as it is in itself and what it is in itself in being itself (thus "essence", if you will)", "a single or unitary being or entity". He points out that (for the atomistic Basran Mu'tazila at least): "[l]iving bodies as such have a kind of unity of being and are qualified by some states in their wholeness as totalities but this unity is not a true unity". Frank, "Al-ma'dūm wal-mawjūd," 195, n. 42. That is, they do not have a true unity because they are inherently composite. God, of course, is excluded from this judgment and for the Mu'tazila in general is a "simple essence". But for al-Māturīdī, as will be seen in more detail in the translated text and commentary, God's "essence" or "essential nature" is constituted in its absolute unity by His essential attributes. It is important to clarify from the outset that this does not mean that he affirms a "simple essence" with the attributes as additional, even if inseparable, elements to it. Such an essence would not, for him, be God as a single unitary entity. For discussion of this point, see under 2.7 (5) ii; 2.12.3 (5) (8). Also, see Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, 142-51.



something has a resemblance to other things, then certain aspects of its whatness (*mā'yya*) can be defined.<sup>70</sup> An example of a basic whatness is the fact shared by anything within the world that it is in a specific place (*makān*)<sup>71</sup> and time (*waqt*),<sup>72</sup> or "spatiotemporal locus". Again, these features are only conceptually distinct from the particular thing in question. Strictly speaking, one would be able to include such determinations within the description of the thing. "What it is" is a thing that exists at such-and-such spatiotemporal locus specified in relation to other things that similarly exist at spatiotemporal loci.<sup>73</sup>

The idea of whatness also allows al-Māturīdī to say something else about the entities that we see in the world. Each such entity is a body (*jism*), which is a compound substance (*'ayn murakkab*).<sup>74</sup> We know that this is the case because we do not only differentiate between things as being in different places at different times, but in terms of the multiple dispositional powers or natures (*ṭabā'i'*) that define their internal composition and exert effects on other bodies. Something is cold and solid (e.g., snow), whereas something else is hot and insubstantial (e.g., fire). Each is compelled (*uḍṭurra*) by its nature to have a certain characteristic effect under the right conditions.<sup>75</sup>

If bodies can be explained as being composed of multiple natures, what are these constituents? It might be supposed that they are just further bodies. Absurd as this sounds, it is close to the view held by the Mu'tazilī Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 220–30/835–45) and seemingly continued in some form by his student Ibn Shabīb who is a significant interlocutor for al-Māturīdī within *The Book of Monotheism*.<sup>76</sup> Al-Nazzām abandoned a "constituent ontology" for a "relational" one in which the infinite

70 2.6 (1); 2.7 (4); 2.7 (5) i b III; 2.7 (5) ii; 3.6 (1).

71 2.12.2 (7); 2.15 (3); 2.16 (3); 4.2 (2).

72 2.11 (1-2); 3.1 (5) ii; 4.3 (2); 4.5 (3).

73 This idea of the relative description of things is important when considering the class of "relational accidents" that will be introduced below. A complete ontological inventory of the world over time must adequately specify relative change for things within the system.

74 2.19 (1) ii.

75 6.7 (2).

76 See 4.5 and 4.7.

interpenetration (*tadākhul*) of bodies comprises the basic category of what exists.<sup>77</sup> Al-Māturīdī rejects this move and mostly ignores the option of a substrate of indivisible "atoms" (*jawāhir*).<sup>78</sup> Rather, drawing inspiration from Ḍirār b. 'Amr (d. 200/815), he understands bodies through a kind of bundle theory of accidents.<sup>79</sup> Reading his arguments carefully, it is clear that he is working with a well-defined and consistent conception that is in direct dialogue with prevailing models among Mu'tazilī and "semi-Mu'tazilī" figures.<sup>80</sup>

ii) Bearing these preliminaries in mind, al-Māturīdī's ontological model can be divided into three categories: a) dispositional accidents; b) relational accidents; and c) vital accidents.<sup>81</sup>

a) The category of "dispositional accidents" (*a'rāḍ* or, preferably, *ṣifāt*), also called parts (*ajzā'*, *ab'āḍ*), comprises the basic constituents of all bodies and their characteristic natures.<sup>82</sup> They are numerous – in one place al-

77 Ibn Shabīb's critique of interpenetration is mentioned in 4.7 (ii). For a description of the concept in the thought of al-Nazzām and its historical background, see van Ess, Josef. *Theology and Society*, Volume 3, 364-71. The distinction between relational and constituent ontologies is discussed in Bradley and Bailey, "Object."

78 See 2.6 (6), where he writes: "the name 'body' is not used in the visible world for indivisible things, such as accident, action, motion and stillness" not mentioning an "atom". Again, in 2.7 (3), he remarks: "For things consist of two categories [i.e., bodies and accidents], and bodies are one of the two." In 2.18 (6), he appears to critique the atomistic position of the Mu'tazila as leading to a lack of divine autonomy over creation: "Then, if [on the view of the Mu'tazila] we imagine that subtle bodily objects are divided into parts that cannot be further divided, it will be impossible to perceive them through the senses and convey them to the mind. [These indivisible parts] may be combined by other than God in proportion to the thinness and thickness of the bodily substances. Thus, the evidence for God based on the perception of bodies may [in reality leads] to the action of another."

79 See al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 2:6-7; Schöck, "Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/745-6) and the 'Jahmiyya' and Ḍirār b. 'Amr (d. 200/815)," 70-71.

80 In terms of a historical genealogy, one might propose that al-Māturīdī creatively synthesized Ḍirār's bundle theory ontology, though likely via its reception by al-Ḥusayn al-Najjār (d. ca 230/845), with ideas of momentary accidents describing relative change shared by many of the Mu'tazila, though perhaps especially Ibn Shabīb. See van Ess, *Theology and Society*, Vol. 4, 171, 146. Also, compare with the discussion in Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām*, 50-52.

81 This categorization is only hinted at within al-Māturīdī's treatment. See, e.g., 6.8 (14). For a more detailed reconstruction of the model, see Harvey and Jalajel, "Al-Māturīdī's Divine Action Model: A Distinctive Account of Causality" (forthcoming).

82 Compare the treatment of color in 2.1.3.1 (7) and 4.8 (1), which indicates the basic identification of natures with this kind of accident in his thought.



Māturīdī suggests there are more than twelve kinds<sup>83</sup> – corresponding to the richness of the phenomenal world. Examples include heat, cold, heaviness, lightness, size, shape and color.<sup>84</sup> This last accident proves a good example because al-Māturīdī explains it in a little more detail. Though each body must have a color, which particular color it has is liable to change. Importantly, when one looks at the colored body, one never sees the accident of color.<sup>85</sup> Instead, one sees the body composite as conditioned by the accident as its “determinant cause” (*ma‘nā*).<sup>86</sup> As mentioned already, this class of accidents explains the aggregate dynamic effects that a given entity has on other things in its surroundings.

Al-Māturīdī makes consistently fascinating theological use of such natures both for his own constructive purposes and in critique of his opponents. A key angle, which I will not explore further at this juncture, relies on the idea that opposing natures would be disposed to flee from each other, thereby destroying their composite body if it were not for the wise arrangement of an external agent, God, who ensures the harmonious pattern that allows them to endure. Al-Māturīdī stresses that not only is it God’s wisdom (*ḥikma*) that allows the natures of a given body to interact in the correct way to perpetuate within their composite form but that their very existence is the direct outcome of His timeless existentiation (*takwīn*).<sup>87</sup>

83 Dīrār, and some of those who had followed him, such as Ḥafṣ al-Fard and al-Ḥusayn al-Najjār, had argued for ten parts as a minimum. Al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, 2:15-16.

84 4.3; 4.8 (1); 4.7 (3); 4.3 (3).

85 Accidents are essentially invisible, see 2.17 (10) iv.

86 See 2.1.3.1 (7).

87 2.14.2; 2.2.1.3 (4-5); 4.3. On the account given so far, al-Māturīdī has shown how the internal composition of a body, considered on its own, changes according to the dynamics of its own causative properties, and how this characteristically affects other bodies around it and vice versa. Proponents of the dominant atomistic ontology sought to raise various difficulties around the structure and individuation of such bodies given the lack of an underlying substrate for their accidental properties. See Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām*, 91-95. Al-Māturīdī’s focus on the impossibility of the stable continuance of the world in the absence of divine wisdom and existentiation gives an indication of why these kinds of arguments would not have held much weight with him: the inherent instability of the natures composing bodies in and of themselves is an important starting point for his arguments. Moreover, it is clear that he thought that once contrary natures were brought together to form a composite body, this entity was able to receive characterization by relational accidents over time. In a fascinating quote preserved from his lost *Maqālāt*, al-Māturīdī suggests that what one needs to know for proving the temporality of the world is that any given object, literally “what subsists as



b) Al-Māturīdī's "relational accidents" are equivalent to those known within Mu'tazili *kalām* as "accidents of being" (*al-akwān*).<sup>88</sup> Al-Māturīdī thinks that these accidents must be posited to explain fundamental features of a body in its spatiotemporal relationships to other bodies in the world. Unlike the accidents that comprise the aggregate dispositions of bodies, al-Māturīdī understands relational accidents as genuinely momentary. They do not, properly speaking, form part of bodies or their underlying natures, but rather are merely conceptual. They express the relation between the outcome of God's act of existentiation in realizing a specific body in its spatiotemporal locus relative to other loci. In fact, according to al-Māturīdī, all relational accidents must be considered in terms of a comparison of the state of a body in *t*<sub>2</sub> relative to *t*<sub>1</sub>. It is in this way that he thinks it becomes possible to account for moment-to-moment change at the level of the body composite.

In this context, there are six main accidents to consider, which can be organized into three pairs of two as follows: joining (*ijtimā'*) and separation (*iftirāq*); motion (*ḥaraka*) and stillness (*sukūn*); endurance (*baqā'*) and annihilation (*fanā'*).

The first pair, joining and separation, deal with the possibility for bodies to combine with one another or to internally divide. This can be explained as follows. If there is an initial state (*t*<sub>1</sub>) in which there are two adjacent bodies, at the second moment (*t*<sub>2</sub>) it is possible that they remain as they are, that they are joined into a single body, or that one or both separate into smaller bodies. Which of these will be the case will be determined by the interaction of natures within each body. The accident of joining is nothing other than the "joined state" of the single body in *t*<sub>2</sub> relative to its prior separate components in *t*<sub>1</sub>.<sup>89</sup>

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an entity from the parts of the world" (*mā qāma bi-l-dhāt min ajzā' al-'ālam*) cannot be devoid of accidents. He then remarks: "As for whether the object in [the world] exists as a thing beyond these accidents or just refers to these accidents of which the body cannot be devoid, there is no need for us to know that." Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adilla*, 1:52. In other words, it is fruitless to speculate whether, beneath the shifting aggregates of dispositions, there is some kind of stable substrate. For an exploration of some of the questions that such a bundle theory must answer in the light of contemporary debates in ontology, see Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, 93-102.

88 See Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām*, 51.

89 He does not express this very explicitly for joining and separation, but it is clear from his discussion of motion, which these accidents closely parallel. Also, see the indication on 2.1.3.2 (1).



Next come motion and stillness (and with them endurance and annihilation). Again, relative to  $t_1$ , a body in  $t_2$  has either moved location or it has not. As we cannot sense accidents directly, it is only the fact of the motion or stillness having occurred (in a body relative to those in its environment) that allows us to ascribe the correct accident to the body in  $t_2$ .<sup>90</sup> From this follow a couple of fascinating observations. First, al-Māturīdī explicitly states that motion and stillness are two names for the accident of endurance.<sup>91</sup> That is, for a body to endure is just for it to either move or stay still. The conceptual aspect of his treatment of endurance is further underscored by the fact that for something to be annihilated is just for it to be absent at the second moment.<sup>92</sup> There is not a thing that takes on a property of non-existence, as that would be to affirm the "thingness of the non-existent" (*shay'īyyat al-ma'dūm*), a major point of controversy with the Mu'tazila.<sup>93</sup> Rather, the fact that a thing in  $t_2$  is absent relative to  $t_1$  is enough to realize its annihilation.<sup>94</sup> Second, it follows, and al-Māturīdī states, that at any body's initial moment of existence, it must be neither moving nor still.<sup>95</sup> This is a corollary of the previous point. The body at its outset cannot have endured in existence because it only has existed for a single moment. It also, obviously, cannot be annihilated at that first moment. Logically too, there is no reference point to say if it is still or moving, as that only makes sense in the second moment of its existence.<sup>96</sup>

This might on the face of it seem to conflict with al-Māturīdī's frequently repeated statement that bodies are never devoid of motion or stillness.<sup>97</sup> I think this must be read as them never being devoid of motion or stillness in

90 4.7; 6.8 (15).

91 6.8 (15).

92 2.1.3.2 (4).

93 2.18 (1).

94 2.1.3.2 (4). In other words, a change in the total pattern of creation has occurred due to its annihilation and that change must be accounted for. The accident of annihilation is how that specific effect of God's existentiatio is to be described within al-Māturīdī's system. The correct way to account for the idea of annihilation in terms of accident models was much discussed in his era. See al-Khayyāt, *Kitāb al-intiṣār*, 19.

95 4.7 (2); 6.8 (15).

96 This position was held too by members of the Basran Mu'tazila, though they spoke about an accident at the initial moment that they called "being" (*kawn*). See Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes*, 98-103.

97 2.1.3 (1-2); 6.3 (3) vii.

the moments at which they can logically be in one or the other state, which is at every moment after their first. To neither be moving or still after that initial moment is to be annihilated. In fact, as al-Māturīdī is very aware, one can turn this point on its head. Imagine that an object was said to possess motion or stillness at its posited "first moment". According to al-Māturīdī's assumptions, that implies that it has, in fact, moved or stayed still relative to a previous moment. This then leads to an infinite regress implying a past-eternal world, which he rules out on a variety of grounds.<sup>98</sup>

c) I will now address a small class of remaining accidents that are of especial importance for the human being as a responsible agent. These principally relate to the three properties of life (*ḥayāt*), knowledge (*ʿilm*) and volitional power (*qudra*), which have a long history in *kalām* discourses, especially in terms of the analogy that they allow between human beings as rational agents and God. From the way that al-Māturīdī treats them, they can be termed "vital accidents", that is, they are the specific properties by which living beings, such as plants, animals and humans, can be distinguished from those that are inanimate.<sup>99</sup> This means that, for al-Māturīdī, it is as if all bodies are characterized by "death" until the vital accident of life is introduced.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, at least based on how power is discussed, these accidents are renewed by God moment by moment. They thus become the basis for articulating a theological anthropology by which the human being can be a responsible agent for God's commands.<sup>101</sup>

First is the accident of life. Al-Māturīdī does not discuss this explicitly very often because he seems to agree with his main interlocutors, such as al-Kaʿbī, that it must be present for the life of living entities, including human beings, and that with its absence comes death. It is important to stress that, like other accidents in this class, life acts as something of a shorthand for God creating a certain intangible phenomenon in a body – here the fact

98 4.7 (2). For arguments against a past-infinity, see 2.1.

99 In 3.3 and 4.8 (6), al-Māturīdī adds "hearing", "seeing", and in the latter place also "dying" (i.e., shifting from an animate to an inanimate state) to the main three vital accidents in the context of arguing that Dahrīs who deny the creator cannot account for them. This indicates the potential to include further accidents within this category.

100 See 2.5.1 (9). Incidentally, this implies that God can, in principle, make anything animate. See the miracles mentioned in 5.5 (3).

101 Compare with Lorenz, "Ancient Theories of Soul".



that a given body is alive and animated at a certain moment – as opposed to the bodily constituents that provide the preconditions for that life. The exact biological processes underpinning the creation of this “spark of life” are not relevant within the discipline of *kalām*.<sup>102</sup>

This point is important when considering the next accident, knowledge (*‘ilm*), also largely a point of agreement between al-Māturīdī and al-Ka’bī, for which life acts as a condition. Knowledge can be delivered in an involuntary manner, for example through the senses, but in its more elevated meaning it refers to what is gained through the active use of the faculties of the intellect. Again, this accident should be understood as the outcome of God creating the experience of whatever one knows at a given moment. Similar to life, discussion of all the categories of knowledge-based experiences open to the human intellect is not the focus of al-Māturīdī’s vision for *kalām*, which is invested in articulating a more general account of the relationship between human and God.

Finally, al-Māturīdī conducts extensive polemics over the accident of “volitional power” (*qudra, quwwa, istiṭā’a*), as this was a key point of dispute with the Mu’tazila in general and al-Ka’bī in particular. At the heart of the argument is a question of how to construe notions of human liability to the divine command and the freedom to respond to it. Al-Māturīdī is insistent that whereas one’s particular “states” (*aḥwāl*) and “means” (*asbāb*), which are ultimately subsumed within one’s existence as a body, govern the question of liability, only a momentary accident of power can account for the phenomenon of free will.<sup>103</sup> The key point in the context of his system is that the accident of power reflects God’s creation of the ability of a rational agent to act freely. It thus can only exist in the moment that an action (*fi’l*) is freely realized. This can be defined more fully as follows: volitional power is that accident by which one chooses to realize a specific act unless prevented.<sup>104</sup> This concept of the will (*irāda*) or choice (*ikhtiyār*) is of paramount importance to al-Māturīdī and went on to influence the

102 See Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes*, 107.

103 See 6.5-6.6.

104 In the case of a choice prevented in the moment of action, one does not in fact have volitional power, since that power is always realized simultaneously with an action. See 6.8 (6) ii.

subsequent Sunni tradition as a whole.<sup>105</sup> What is significant in the present context is that *ikhtiyār* does not reflect a separate accident but rather expresses the connection made between the accident of power and an action that is chosen or could have been counterfactually chosen to be its effect. The presence of free choice in exercising volitional power leads to the rational agent's "acquisition" (*kasb*) of the act when all proper conditions are met and hence to reward or punishment for it in the Hereafter.<sup>106</sup>

From this discussion, it can be seen that al-Māturīdī's ontology governs the entirety of the human condition, moving from the initial investigation of worldly objects and the possibility to infer from them the existence and attributes of the creator, all the way to account for the moral imperatives of human life. The theological decisions made at each stage reflect the particularities of al-Māturīdī's intellectual perspective and take into account a certain expression of his religious tradition, including the framing of received interpretations of scripture. At the same time, it should be appreciated the extent to which he underscores the rational intelligibility of his system as a model that he looks to vindicate against the alternatives offered by his major interlocutors.

### 3) The Formal Structural Features of *The Book of Monotheism*:

Having appreciated the progression of theological content within the pages of *The Book of Monotheism*, it behoves us to pay attention to its formal structural features. Its 206 folios, in the manuscript housed in the University of Cambridge, corresponding to over 400 pages in the printed Arabic editions, is substantial for a work of *kalām* (typically a relatively concise genre), and becomes more impressive when considering it against what remains extant from the early Sunni theological tradition of al-Māturīdī's time. His exceptionally dense style of theological presentation should also be recalled here: he is able to pack a great deal of content into his pages.

i) Based on the features of the single extant manuscript of *The Book of Monotheism*, al-Māturīdī does relatively little to formally indicate his work's intricate structure. He provides no headings at the level of "Chapter", as

105 See Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 307-8; Bruckmayr, "The Particular Will (*al-irādat al-juz'īyya*)", 3, 12.

106 6.3 (3).



adopted in the present translation, but regularly uses the section divider "Enquiry" (*mas'ala*),<sup>107</sup> a style that was by no means uncommon in theological and juristic discourse and was retained after him within his tradition.<sup>108</sup>

Fathalla Kholeif, in his Arabic edition, stuck to this Enquiry level of organization throughout, though he expanded the number of such headings using the topical flow of ideas and such textual features as "Abū Maṣṣūr said..." (*qāla Abū Maṣṣūr*) to indicate sections. Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammad Aruḥi followed Kholeif closely in many of his section headings. But they almost doubled the number of Enquiries to reflect the different theological questions under discussion.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, the latter editors introduced the "Chapter" (*bāb*) as a structural feature to the text. After the initial discussion on epistemology, which they did not count as a chapter, they organized the text into five chapters, which can be translated as follows: 1) Enquiries of Divinity, 2) Enquiries of Prophethood, 3) Enquiries of the Decree and Determination, 4) Enquiries of the Major Sin and Sinner, 5) Enquiries of Belief and Islam.

The organization of Topaloğlu and Aruḥi was used by the Translator in his initial draft of this translation, though he added hierarchical numbering to the sections and subsections.<sup>110</sup> In editing the text, I have added some further refinements to the above. In order for numbered cross-referencing to be consistent, I saw that with the exception of the initial introduction, the epistemological discussion should be made into its own chapter. Furthermore, it became clear to me that the existing chapter "Enquiries of Divinity", which took up nearly half of the book, should actually conclude

107 This term presents difficulties in consistently translating from Arabic to English, though the meaning is clear enough in any given context. It can variously mean "enquiry", "problem", "topic", "issue", "question" etc., and can refer both to the framing of a given investigation and its specific content. For consistency, the term "enquiry" has been adopted for its use within the titles of the chapters and sections of the text, as this seems to best capture what al-Māturīdī intends within his theological discourse.

108 For instance, the same format is used by Abū al-Yusr al-Bazdawī in his *Uṣūl al-dīn*.

109 Kholeif lists 57 sections in his contents page, whereas Topaloğlu and Aruḥi list 95.

110 One exception is that the Translator initially kept to Kholeif's ordering, following the manuscript, of section 1.3 Objections to the Validity of Sensory, Narrational and Rational Knowledge, which comes after 2.2 in the text. The Editor, with the Translator's agreement, has followed Topaloğlu and Aruḥi in moving it to the end of Chapter 1, given its thematic coherence. This is the only place in which the order of the manuscript has not been followed.



at 2.19. "Enquiry: [Qualifying and Naming God Does Not Require Similarity]". The remainder is then split into two chapters: Chapter Three: Enquiries of Divine Wisdom and Chapter Four: Enquiries of Heresiography. Apart from the coherence of organizing the content in this way, supporting evidence can be found in the fact that Chapter Three begins with the *bas-mala* (invocation of the name of God) and *ḥamd* (praise for God), while Chapter Four begins with *ḥamd* alone.<sup>111</sup>

ii) We can now turn from consideration of the macrostructural features of the text to the microstructural. Here al-Māturīdī, or possibly an early editor in the hidden premodern process of textual transmission, is more interventional though no less idiosyncratic. The reader of the *The Book of Monotheism* regularly encounters a small set of pithy invocations, which are typically used to indicate the end of a section or topical paragraph. One can imagine that at a time in which the book was encountered within a single continuous manuscript, and with only a few "Enquiry" headings, such invocations, alongside their devotional function, played a vital role in helping the reader navigate the progression of ideas. In *The Book of Monotheism*, the invocation *Strength comes from God alone* (*wa-lā quwwata illa bi-llāh*) is ubiquitous. In a distant second place, one finds *God alone leads to success* (*wa-llāhu al-muwaffiq*), followed by *God knows best* (*wa-llāhu a'lam*) and more. These invocations have been italicized in the translation and though they were already used by the editors of the existing Arabic editions, they have remained helpful in determining section numbering and paragraphing, though they do not conclude paragraphs in every case. On the rarer occasions that the author uses similar expressions within sentences, they have not been italicized.

iii) The numbering of the sections, subsections and even arguments within *The Book of Monotheism* is an important feature of the present translation that it is hoped will considerably aid the reader in appreciating the flow of al-Māturīdī's ideas. The Translator worked hard to provide a numbering system within sections that reflects the different arguments and counterarguments addressed by the text's author. Dividing up the text in

111 Further discussion of the textual evidence for this division has preceded in section 1 of this Editor's Introduction.



this way accurately is challenging, especially as it must be undertaken hand-in-hand with identifying the arguments that belong to the author and those in which he paraphrases or quotes from his interlocutors. Additionally, al-Māturīdī tends to put forward many related arguments on a given question, such that they flow into one another. Nevertheless, within his theological discourse the author frequently writes of a first, second, or third point etc., and these have been incorporated into the numbering system, rather than preserved within the written text, unless retaining them is stylistically more appropriate. The work of the Editor in relation to subsection numbering has mainly been to expand the system introduced by the Translator and to ensure its consistency. A section is specified by a hierarchical series of numbers in the following pattern: Chapter, Section, Subsection, Sub-subsection (e.g., 2.2.1.2), though the latter two, and especially the final one, are rare. Within a specified section come numbered points: 1), 2), 3) etc., which refer to arguments, whether by al-Māturīdī or the opponent to whom he is responding, or major topical points. Each of these may have further sub-arguments or options using the notation i), ii), iii) etc. Finally, if needed, a), b), c), and then I), II), III) etc., are used. The idea is that a particular argument or point made by the author within the book can be quickly pinpointed by a reference using this system (and it has been utilized in this way within internal cross-references).

#### 4) Editing and annotating *The Book of Monotheism*

Editing *The Book of Monotheism* has been immensely challenging and time-consuming, taking nearly a year of intensive work (and lighter efforts before and after this main period). I have had the wonderful benefit of working with a complete rendition of the text into English, and it is only because of the prior labors of the Translator that I have been in the position to follow the procedures that I detail in this section.

i) The text produced by the Translator has been compared line-by-line with the Arabic edition of Topaloğlu and Aruçi, and with both Kholeif's edition and the original manuscript at the points of their divergence.<sup>112</sup>

112 I note that in early 2024, after primary editing of this translation was complete, a version of *Kitāb al-tawhīd* edited by Aḥmad Sa'd al-Damānḥūrī became available. Like the present book, this edition compares the manuscript to the edition of Kholeif, as well as to that of Topaloğlu and Aruçi, arguing for new readings in certain places. The

a) Where the translation agrees with the reading selected by Topaloğlu and Aruçi, no note has been made, except in certain cases, for instance when they have made an emendation to the manuscript's text.

b) Where the translation follows instead either the manuscript or Kholeif's reading, that has been noted.<sup>113</sup>

c) In some cases, the Translator has suggested his own emendations to the text, which have been checked. These are marked with (*Translator*).

d) Original emendations to the text by the Editor based on scrutiny of the digitized manuscript and its marginalia have been noted and left unmarked.

ii) In editing the main translated text, the following principles have been followed:

a) Square brackets, which were already used frequently by the Translator, have been further expanded and edited such that the addition of necessary words, the frequent clarification of pronouns, and the glossing of difficult sentences using "i.e.," only occurs within them. This means that the reader can be confident that, as far as has been possible, the main text reflects an idiomatic (though not word-for-word) translation of al-Māturīdī's Arabic.

b) An effort has been made to enhance the Translator's style of translation for al-Māturīdī, which I greatly appreciate, by increasing its clarity for each argument at hand. The result is stylistically a truly hybrid text, blending elements of al-Māturīdī's original Arabic style, that of the Translator and that of the Editor.

c) I have placed a high priority on accurately interpreting and presenting the theological arguments within *The Book of Monotheism* to the reader. Where deemed necessary, I have extensively adjusted or retranslated from

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edition also revises chapter/section titles and pays attention to manuscript marginalia. Given that this edition essentially represents a chronologically parallel, albeit quite distinct, effort to understand the text anew, the present Editor will leave it to readers to identify points of agreement and disagreement between the two projects. See al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. Aḥmad Sa'd al-Damānḥūrī.

113 Due to the relative frequency of citations to these texts and their incorporation into arguments within the annotations, the following notation has been adopted: "MS." is used to indicate the manuscript of *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, "TA" for the second (2010) edition by Topaloğlu and Aruçi, and "K" for that of Kholeif (1970).



the Arabic source, though always bearing in mind the overall approach set by the Translator. Interpretive readings have been explained in the notes.

d) The translation of technical terms has been made consistent within the text. The aim has been to allow the reader who is familiar with the vocabulary employed within *kalām* in general, and by al-Māturīdī in particular, to identify the terms that he uses in any given place without needing to refer to the Arabic source. Where it is helpful, transliterations have been used on a technical term's first occurrence, though in general readers should consult the book's glossary for a full list.

e) Qur'anic verses have usually been kept as presented by the Translator in his initial translation. These mainly, though not exclusively, follow a version of the translation of Marmaduke Pickthall that has been updated to a more contemporary English register. Though not as popular today as it was in the twentieth century, Pickthall's rendition has the virtue of staying close to the Qur'an's Arabic text,<sup>114</sup> which is helpful in presenting al-Māturīdī's Qur'anic quotations as the theological proof texts that they are. Where needed, I have modified the Qur'anic translations to make sure that they cohere with the argument under discussion, and that relevant terms drawn from the Qur'an into the theological debate are consistent. I have also regularly used square brackets to expand the portion of the Qur'anic text quoted to include key expressions that al-Māturīdī expected his readers to immediately grasp.

f) I have not adjusted the Translator's chosen rendition of the regular invocations employed in the text.<sup>115</sup> They are well chosen and provide a distinctive rhythm to this translated version of *The Book of Monotheism*.

g) As a work of classical Arabic literature, *The Book of Monotheism* uses words such as "man" (*rajul*) and the pronoun "he" (*huwa*) as a default gender when writing about abstract matters referring to the human being in general. I have judged it in most places to be anachronistic and too far a deformation of al-Māturīdī's text to try to edit this usage, which was also preserved by the Translator.

114 See Abdel Haleem (trans.), *The Qur'an*, xxvii.

115 See 3 (ii) in this Editor's Introduction.

iii) Commenting on al-Māturīdī's magnum opus has been a daunting task. Truth be told, the book deserves a depth in commentary that goes far beyond the scope of the present project. Nevertheless, it was always my aspiration in taking on the role of Editor for this volume that *The Book of Monotheism* should receive sufficient annotation to be understood as a work of theology.

a) Beyond the linguistic clarifications mentioned above, the Translator has made a number of further comments on matters of theological content, which are followed by (*Translator*). Other annotations, comprising the majority, come from the Editor and have been left unmarked.

b) The primary purpose of the annotations is to provide the minimal theological commentary for al-Māturīdī's often tricky arguments to be understood. That means that they are not spread uniformly throughout the text but are rather clustered in the places of most technical difficulty, especially towards the front of the book. Not only are these typically the hardest parts of the work to understand but once I have explained a particular theological perspective I will usually either refrain from repeating it or greatly summarise it when it comes up again. It may be of interest to the reader to know that these notes were often written upon coming to an insight after struggling with the theological meaning of a particular passage. My hope is that they will allow the reader to grasp al-Māturīdī's intent in the same way (or even better!)

c) The secondary purpose of the annotations is to provide historical context for the arguments expressed in the text, including brief clarification of names and terms with reference to relevant primary and secondary literature. Here I must express that there has been an intentional avoidance of using the later classical and postclassical Māturīdī tradition as a lens through which to interpret *The Book of Monotheism*. That is, without doubt, a respectable theological project. But both Translator and Editor are in agreement that in the context of recovering this work as a unique source text for that tradition, it is necessary to situate it within contemporaneous and prior discourses. Note too that I have made no attempt here to be comprehensive, so the lack of a citation should not be assumed to indicate absence of a relevant textual context.



d) Qur'anic verse and Hadith citations for scriptural quotations in the main text were included by the Translator in his initial draft and follow the comprehensive identificatory efforts of Topaloğlu and Aruçi. I have only lightly edited them. Hadiths that can be found in some form within the Six Canonical Sunnī Books have been cited by chapter name and common *Bāb* numbers to facilitate easy reference. These books, like the Qur'an with its familiar sura and verse numbers, are not listed in the Bibliography.

To conclude this introduction, I would like to acknowledge those people without whom my role in this publication would not be possible. This has been an international project, and it has been wonderful to build a working relationship with colleagues in Turkey, truly the world's great centre of Māturīdī studies over the past decades. I am extremely grateful to the Translator, Prof. Tahir Uluç, for bringing me on board and placing great trust in me to deliver on a project that he cares so deeply about. I would like to give my sincere thanks to all those who have supported the publication of this book from Ibn Haldun University, especially Mr. Necmeddin Bilal Erdoğan, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Ibn Haldun University. To make this unique work accessible to the global public is a great undertaking and a true service to this noble intellectual tradition. I am especially grateful too to Dr. Savaş Cihangir Tali, Director of Ibn Haldun Publishing House, for sharing the Translator and Editor's vision for their collaboration, and to Ayşenur Alper who has been my point of contact.

I have been very blessed to work in the role of Lecturer at the Cambridge Muslim College, which has given me the space to pursue a project of this scale. I thank all my colleagues there and especially Dr. Talal Al-Azem who, as Academic Director, has made every effort to support the research of faculty members. I would also like to voice my appreciation to my wider network of friends and colleagues all over the world: our discussions have enriched me immeasurably in the field of Islamic theology. I must pay special tribute to Dr. David Solomon Jalajel who has offered me generous and intellectually formidable companionship in puzzling over the most technically difficult aspects of al-Māturīdī's system, and to

Arnold Yasin Mol who has always helped me to appreciate the bigger picture of his theology. May God bless you all, and may He give a special blessing to my family for their patience with me burning the candle at both ends to complete this work.

Ramon Harvey  
December 1, 2023  
London/Cambridge  
United Kingdom



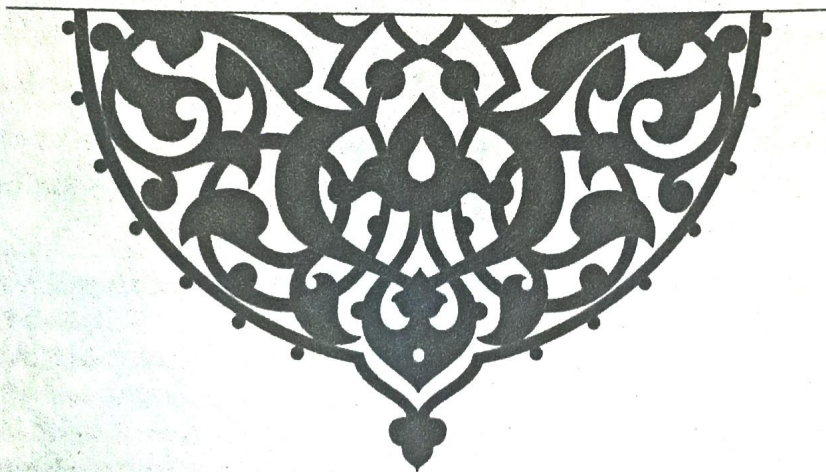


كِتَابُ التَّوْحِيدِ



KITĀB AL-TAWHĪD

The Book of Monotheism



## Introduction

*In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful*

Praise belongs to God, to whom every praise that is used in praising others truly returns. He is worthy of a praise that corresponds to His blessings, equals His expansion of them, and achieves His pleasure. We ask Him to bless the one [i.e., Muḥammad] with whom the divine messengerhood was sealed, as well as his fellow messengers and all his supporters. We seek refuge in Him from slipping and we turn to Him with those words and deeds that will ennoble us.

Shaykh Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Now, we observe that people have different religious beliefs,<sup>116</sup> and despite this difference, they display the following common attitude towards religion. Everyone thinks that only his religious belief is right, and the religious belief of others is wrong. Yet, everyone is in agreement in having a tradition.<sup>117</sup> In that case, the mere possession of a tradition does not establish the correctness of its follower because the follower of another tradition may have the opposite religious belief, due to there being no difference between them other than the numerousness [of their followers].<sup>118</sup> But the situation is different if one [i.e., a prophet]<sup>119</sup> on whom a member of such traditions relies has rational evidence confirming his claims and a proof that compels the fair-minded to acknowledge that he has reached the truth. Therefore,

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116 Or: "different schools of thought among the faiths in religion" (*mukhtalif al-madhāhib fī al-niḥal*).

117 Lit. "a predecessor who is followed" (*salaf yuqallad*).

118 Or: "due to there being a great number [of traditions]".

119 Al-Māturīdī writes about this relied-upon person in general so as to preserve the universality of his discourse, a style of composition that continues throughout this introduction. Nevertheless, he may have a prophet and specifically the Prophet Muḥammad in mind.



whoever is referred to in religion after fulfilling the obligation to verify him possesses the truth, and everyone should find the truth in what he adopts as religion. It is as if the religion that he [i.e., the prophet]<sup>120</sup> practices, together with the evidence of its truth and the witness of reality to it, encompasses everyone else, because were others to attain the same evidence as him, it would compel their intellects to accept the same truth. This evidence has already appeared for the one whom I have mentioned.<sup>121</sup> So, it is impossible for similar evidence to obtain for others who have a religious belief that is opposite to his as that would mean a conflict of rational evidence after his evidence has prevailed and the reasons for the others' doubts have proved to be unfounded. *Strength comes from God alone.*

The principle upon which religion is known is twofold: tradition and reason. For there must be a religion upon which people should unite and a foundation upon which they should rely.

As for tradition, no one can avoid taking it as a way,<sup>122</sup> relying upon it and calling others to it. In addition to those who accept the existence and reality of things, even the skeptics and agnostics<sup>123</sup> agree to this. On this basis proceeds the politics of worldly rulers who wish to order their affairs with religious belief, uniting the hearts of their subjects upon it.<sup>124</sup> Those who claim messengerhood and wisdom, as well as those who practice various arts, do the same. *We ask God for help and salvation.*

As for the rational evidence [regarding the need for religion], it is as follows: it is against wisdom that this world should have come into existence only to perish. Every rational agent abhors their action leaving the path of wisdom. Thus, it is impossible for the world, of which the intellect itself is a part, to be founded without wisdom and purpose. Once this has been established, it follows that the world [and human society as part of it] has been created to sustain, not to perish.<sup>125</sup>

120 This gloss appears as a marginal note on MS. 1v.

121 This could be referring again to the Prophet Muḥammad or to the person of a given tradition who is confronted by his proofs.

122 Or: "a school of thought" (*madhhab*).

123 Lit. "people of doubt and feigned ignorance" (*aṣḥāb al-shukūk wa-l-tajāḥul*).

124 Compare with the idea of 'aṣabiyya (group identity) in Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 156–57.

125 Here al-Māturīdī introduces the pair of *al-baqā'* and *al-fanā'*, which are used in a social sense as well as for the accidents of endurance and annihilation. See 2.1.3.2 (4).

[As for the relationship among the triad of religion, wisdom, and the survival of human society, one can explain it as follows]. The world is in its origin built from different natures and contrary aspects,<sup>126</sup> especially the one [i.e., the human being] who is its objective on account of the intellect that unites what needs to be united and separates what needs to be separated. He is that which is called by the philosophers "the microcosm".<sup>127</sup> In fact, [human beings] are composed of various whims, differing natures, and desires that overwhelm them. If people were left alone in their nature, there would be dispute over their attraction to benefits, glory, honor, authority and political power. This leads to mutual hatred and war and in this is extinction and corruption, which were they connected to the existence of the world would nullify its wisdom. Secondly, human beings and all animals have been created to live only on food and on things that sustain their bodies for a certain period of time. Accordingly, if there was no other intent in their creation besides their perishing, those things on which their lives depend would not need to be created. Because of this truth [i.e., humanity is not created just to perish], there must be a basis that will establish unity and solidarity among people, preventing them from falling into division and conflict that leads to extinction. It is therefore necessary to seek a basis [i.e., religion] that shall unite people to the extent that it is possible for their faculties to comprehend it.

126 See al-Kindī, who discusses composition in terms of the "building" from contrary elements. Adamson and Pormann, *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, 323-24. Note that, within the context of al-Māturīdī's ontological system, the first moment of creation must have at least one body formed of natures in this way, and that this pattern is repeated for all subsequent bodies that are generated in the unfolding of time. See Harvey and Jalajel, "Al-Māturīdī's Divine Action Model: A Distinctive Account of Causality" (forthcoming).

127 Al-Māturīdī sees the human as the microcosm who parallels the world as the macrocosm due to having conflicting internal natures that would lead to destruction if left on their own. He uses this idea in several related ways within *The Book of Monotheism*. When considering the human being as an individual, it is the intellect ('aql) that overcomes the destructive tendencies of one's natures. In the present context, when thinking about society, it is religion that achieves this goal. Finally, in relation to the entire world, it is God, specifically through the exercise of divine wisdom, who allows it to endure. For preceding use of this analogy in al-Kindī and Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāhīz (255/868-69), see Adamson and Pormann, *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, 185, 231, 305; Montgomery, *Al-Jāhīz*, 409-10. Also see Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, 18, n. 35.



Since we know that all beings we see are in need and necessarily require help, it is fitting that they have a governor [i.e., God] who knows their states and what their survival depends on, who has created them in need of various things and does not leave them alone with their ignorance and overwhelming desires – when they need to know those things that will help them to survive – without establishing someone who will show and teach them these things. Without doubt [such a governor] shall provide evidence by which people will know who is singled out for their leadership due to their need for him. So, from their affair [of rationally knowing the world is wisely sustained from perishing], is that which we have explained: true is the one who depends on the discourse of another [i.e., the prophet] whom the knower of the state of the world [i.e., God] has made a refuge and support for people.

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**Chapter One**

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**Enquiries of Epistemology**

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### [1.1. Invalid Means of Knowledge]

Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: There has been disagreement on the means to distinguish the useful, true and good things from their opposites.

1) [Intuition:] Some people have said that when the goodness of something occurs to one's heart, one should hold fast to it.<sup>128</sup>

2) [Inspiration:] Others have said that the human being cannot fully know the means of knowledge, but he should still hold fast to what he has been inspired with, because the inspiration comes from the one who governs the world [i.e., God].<sup>129</sup>

The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: The occurrence of something to the heart and inspiration are far from being valid means of knowledge, because although the aspects of opposition and contradiction within religions are obvious, every religion claims itself to be true. It is impossible for the true means of knowledge to act as such, because in this case the false would assume the image of the true. Therefore, it is impossible to trust someone so openly wrong. In addition, this person believes an opinion to be correct by means of that which I have mentioned to be present with his opponent [i.e., inspiration], while his opponent by relying on his own inspiration says that the former's opinion is wrong. However, neither

128 This possibly addresses a group of the Mu'tazila, of which al-Jāhiz is most infamous, who held that human beings gained knowledge "necessarily" by nature, that is, without the need to acquire it through reasoned reflection. See van Ess, "Early Islamic Theologians on the Existence of God," 1436-41.

129 The immediate target of al-Māturidī's concerns may have been the debate that occurred during his lifetime in Rayy between the Ismā'īlī missionary Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī (d. 322/934) and the philosopher Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 313/925 or 323/935). The latter figure, who rejected prophetic revelation, claimed that it was implausible to believe that God would only inspire a single prophet, rather than all of humanity. See al-Rāzī, *Rasā'il falsafiyya*, 296; Crone, "Post-Colonialism in Tenth-Century Iran," 3-4. Al-Māturidī addresses worries over the need for messengerhood in 5.1 and particularly 5.1 (3) ii b.

does he have any evidence different from that of the other in establishing his opinion, nor is that [inspirational evidence] the kind of thing that can eliminate disagreement and conflict, which lead to destruction.<sup>130</sup>

3) [The drawing of lots:] Accordingly, the knowledge imparted by the drawing of lots in matters which a rational person is incapable of deciding is invalid, too.<sup>131</sup> This method does not provide satisfying knowledge because its results are inconsistent.

4) Physiognomy:] Such is the case with the physiognomist, too.<sup>132</sup>

Therefore, the drawing of lots and physiognomy cannot be valid means of knowledge. *Strength comes from God alone.*

## [1.2. Valid Means of Knowledge]

Shaykh Abū Mansūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Conversely, the way leading to knowledge of the realities<sup>133</sup> of things consists of sensation, reports, and reflection.

### [1.2.1. Sensation]

Sensation is the knowledge that is obtained through the senses. It is the source that includes knowledge having no counterpart from the category of ignorance. Therefore, anyone who claims that sensation has

130 See the discussion in the Editor's Introduction and also Harvey, *Transcendent Go Rational World*, 19-20.

131 Al-Ka'bi is said to have approved the use of casting lots to determine the imam (i.e., the caliph) in cases of dispute. See al-Nasafi, *Tabṣīrat al-adilla*, 2:826. The drawing of lots for decisions is condemned in Q. 5:3 and 5:90. In his commentary on Q. 5:3, al-Māturīdī draws the inference that the method of drawing lots should not be used for legislation. Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-qur'ān*, 4:149. In 5:90, he identifies a scenario in which someone without the ability to discern between what is correct or not is given a position of authority. In this scenario, the people are blamed for installing this clueless figure, but he may draw lots to decide on legal matters. Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-qur'ān*, 4:325-26. Note that though the mechanism for drawing lots can be considered to be based on chance, it is often invested with the social meaning of allowing a divine or transcendent order to disclose its preference. Yet for al-Māturīdī a basic aspect of what it means for God to be wise is that human beings can determine an order to things beyond random occurrence.

132 Physiognomy is the ancient practice of making decisions involving people based on their facial features. There is a hint in a letter by al-Jāhīz that physiognomy had been used to choose the Chief Qadi. See Montgomery, *Al-Jāhīz*, 210.

133 Or: "truths" (*ḥaqā'iq*).



counterpart from the category of ignorance [that is, one who claims to have no sensory knowledge] is one who denies this knowledge due to obstinacy. Even the nature of irrational animals abstains from being at this level, because every irrational animal knows what causes it to survive and perish, and what gives pleasure and pain. But the proponent of this opinion denies this as well. There is a consensus that one should not debate with someone who holds such an opinion, because he fails to affirm his denial and his existence, whereas the discussion is conducted on the whatness<sup>134</sup> or isness<sup>135</sup> of a thing. However, he not only denies these two, but also denies the fact that he denies them. Yet one can ridicule him<sup>136</sup> by saying to him: "Do you know that you are negating?" If he says, "No", his negation becomes invalid. If he says, "Yes", he affirms his negation. Thus, by this negation, he negates his negation. Another approach one may take towards him is to subject him to severe pain, such as cutting off his limbs with the aim of discouraging his obstinacy. For we are aware that he has sensation, because it is necessary knowledge; yet he merely speaks obstinately. What the like of him deserves is what I mentioned: that he should be vexed<sup>137</sup> and grieved by being treated with a similar obstinacy, so that he is exposed to disgrace.<sup>138</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

134 The "whatness" (*mā'iyya*) of something for al-Māturīdī answers the question: "What is it?" by providing a description of its common features with other bodies and the accidents by which they are composed and characterized. See 3.6. It thus provides a minimal description of the "kind" of thing something is in relation to other objects of experience and can operate at different levels of abstraction. Al-Māturīdī gives the example that the whatness of any "body" is its possession of three dimensions, whereas the whatness of a human being is the possession of rationality and mortality. See 2.7 (5) ii. Also see Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, 75-76.

135 The "isness" (*hastīyya*) of an object is the fact that it exists and is equivalent to its "thingness" (*shay'iyya*); see 2.7 (5) i b I. As a thing (*shay'*), it is not non-existent (*ma'dūm*). God's isness is affirmed, though it is not comparable to the isness of created things, which all possess a contingent whatness; see 2.2.1.5. Hence God is "a thing that is not like things". See 2.7 (1).

136 This translation is based on a correction of MS. 3r to *yumāzahu* in TA, 70. It is retained in K, 7, as *yumāziju*, which can be translated: "Rather, he mixes [affirmation and denial]".

137 Or, more literally, "cut" (*li-yujza'a*), referring back to the previous point.

138 Lit. "so that the veil before him is violated" (*fa-yanhatika ladayhi sitrahu*).

## [1.2.2. Reports]

The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: Reports consist of two kinds.<sup>139</sup> If one denies both, one belongs to the first category of people [above], because he denies his denial, too, as his denial is also a report. Thus, he denies the fact that he denies when he denies. [If one denies reports as a means of knowledge], the following [losses] occur:

1) He cannot know his lineage, name, whatness, name of his substance, nor the name of anything.

2) It follows that he cannot know the sensory things, and if he is asked about what he sees, he cannot convey it.

3) How can he attain knowledge of what may reach him from the things that are absent from him?

4) Or how can he know his means of livelihood and subsistence, because all these reach him through reports.

5) Denying reports involves denying the greatest blessings of God to man, the blessing of speech and understanding,<sup>140</sup> which forms the basis of the superiority of human beings to irrational animals. Therefore, this is the ultimate limit of obstinacy.

Shaykh Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The way to obtain, through these two [kinds of reports],<sup>141</sup> knowledge of the good and bad things, which reason cannot know on its own, consists in using languages by speaking and listening to them.

The correct way of debating with one who denies reports – although debating with such a person is folly – is to ridicule him, too.<sup>142</sup> We say to him when he denies the reports: “What do you say?” If he repeats his words, then as soon as he repeats his words, you know that he has accepted your report, i.e., your request for him to repeat his words. If he fails to repeat

139 These are described in 1.2.2.1 and 1.2.2.2.

140 Lit. “hearing” (*samʿ*), It could also be translated as “tradition”, in the sense that human beings are able, through speech and the sharing of reports, to develop traditions (see the Introduction).

141 An interlinear note on MS. 3v suggests that the two things mentioned are sensation and the report. But it more coherently refers to the two kinds of reports.

142 The same decision between *yumāzaḥu* (he is ridiculed) and *yumāziju* (he mixes [affirmation and denial]) reoccurs here.



his words, you avert his evil, praise God, and laugh at [such a denier]. You can adopt a similar attitude towards the denier of sensation by saying to him: "What do you say?" If he repeats his previous statement, you understand that he is aware of sensation but pretends to ignore it because of obstinacy. If he fails to repeat his words, you avert his evil and thank God for what He has inspired in you.<sup>143</sup> Or you can beat and hurt the one who denies reports, because he cannot complain or respond to you with blame. This is because, in order to do that, he must first name your action, which is known only through a report; yet he has already denied it. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Now, if accepting reports is something that is rationally necessary, it is necessary to accept the reports of the messengers; [firstly], because there are no reports more obviously true than those brought by [the messengers] for they bring miracles<sup>144</sup> proving their truth; and [secondly], because there is not a report among the knowledge that we have explained with which the heart is more content, that is more clearly truthful, and for which the denier is obstinate as a rational necessity than the reports of the messengers, may God bless them. Therefore, those who deny them are more deserving to be judged for obstinacy and arrogance.

#### [1.2.2.1. Mass-transmitted Reports (*Mutawātir*)]

The reports that reach us from the messengers [of God] come to us via the mouths of people who possibly err and lie, as there is no proof for their veracity and no evidence for their infallibility. Therefore, such reports need to be examined. If it is established that a report is such that deceit is impossible, then whoever hears it must bear witness to its truth from the one whose infallibility is clearly evident. Thus, this is a description of the mass-transmitted report (*mutawātir*) [i.e., a report conveyed by a group of people whose number is too many to agree on a lie]. In fact, although no proof is established to demonstrate that every one of the group who

143 This positive reference to inspiration (*ilhām*) shows that al-Māturīdī does not reject it absolutely but does not see it as a viable source for the public grounding of knowledge that directs his project. See also the description in al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-qur'ān*, 8:142.

144 Lit. "signs" (*al-āyāt*). This is al-Māturīdī's preferred terminology.

transmits the *mutawātir* is infallible, if the reports conveyed by them reach this limit in profusion, it becomes clear that the reporters are veracious and that they are [collectively] protected from lying, even though the opposite of this may turn out to be the case when they are evaluated individually. The same holds true for matters that are judged by exhaustive inquiry (*ijtihād*). Even if those who exercise exhaustive inquiry are individually liable to make mistakes and err, they agree due to God who facilitates them in that in order to reveal His truth. Since each [jurist's] inclinations and desires are different, it is not possible for [their] opinions to reach that [agreement] without the grace and blessings of God, the Almighty and the Praiseworthy, who has the power to reveal His truth and protect His creatures<sup>145</sup> in any manner that He wishes. *Strength comes from God alone.*

#### [1.2.2.2. Single Reports (*Wāhid*)]

There is another type of report, which does not reach that level in obliging knowledge, nor in witnessing that it is the truth coming from the Prophet of Divine Mercy. Therefore, one should act or should not act upon this report only by exercising exhaustive inquiry and reflection into the personal states of the transmitters. The apparent report is that which has apparent due right<sup>146</sup> and permissibility within the tradition in which it is encompassed.<sup>147</sup> One, thus, acts upon the more probable view, even if there is a possibility of being wrong. For even in the context of sensory knowledge, which is the highest kind of knowledge, one may have to act upon the more probable view due to the weakness of the senses and the distance or subtlety of the object to be perceived. In deciding whether to abandon such reports or to act upon them, one does not resort to complete knowledge, and in tending to either one, one moves away from the due right of reports. Therefore, one needs to decide between the two views on the basis of exhaustive inquiry. *Strength comes from God alone.*

145 "Creatures" has often been chosen as a translation for *khalq* because it avoids the ambiguity in the word "creation" between the act and its result. This is especially important when discussing the attribute of existentionation (*takwīn*).

146 Reading *haqquhu* with MS. 4r.

147 For reports falling short of certainty, the context of the tradition in which a report is transmitted, as discussed in the Introduction, affects its *prima facie* plausibility.



### [1.2.3. Reflection]

Reflection is needed as a means of knowledge for the following reasons:

1) It is needed for the knowledge imparted by the senses and by reports. This need relates to objects that are far from the senses or are too small and to the reports that may be true or false.

2) Reflection is also needed in distinguishing between the miracles of the messengers and the tricks of magicians and others. Likewise, reflection is needed in seeking to recognize miracles by thinking about the powers of the human being and the states of the person who produced the miracle. Thus, the truth appears with its light and falsehood with its darkness.

3) God pointed to the necessity of reflection through what is established by miraculous proofs to come from Himself, such as the Qur'an, the like of which human beings and jinn are incapable of producing. The Qur'an commands us to think by saying: "We will show them Our signs in the outside world"<sup>148</sup>, until the end of the sura; "Will they not regard the camels, [how they are created]?";<sup>149</sup> "Indeed, [there are many proofs] in the creation of the heavens and the earth";<sup>150</sup> "And in you selves...Do you not see?"<sup>151</sup> In this verse and others, God encourages reflection, obliges us to take a lesson, and commands thinking and consideration, informing that these will lead people to the truth and show them the right path. *Strength comes from God alone.*

4) One who denies reflection has no recourse other than reflection to dispute it. Thus, the very attempt to dispute shows its necessity.

5) The wisdom in the creation must be known, since something like it cannot be enacted foolishly.<sup>152</sup> Likewise, [the world] contains evidence that there is [either] one who brought it into existence or that it was self-generated, or its is temporal or eternal. The only way to know any of this is through reflection.

148 Q. 41:53-54.

149 Q. 88:17-20.

150 Q. 2:164.

151 Q. 51:20-21.

152 Al-Māturīdī returns to the theme of his Introduction, pointing out the rational necessity of the world being wisely made.

6) The human being has been specially granted the management of created beings and the responsibility that this entails, to seek by reason what is the most beneficial for them, to choose what is good, and to avoid the opposite.<sup>153</sup> The only way to know these is to use the intellect to reflect on things.

7) Anyone who is beset with doubts and suspicions immediately starts reflecting and deliberating on [the matter in doubt]. This proves that reflection indicates truths and leads to them. Just as recourse is taken to sight and hearing and every sense by which things are perceived when a confusion arises about color, sound and other things, recourse is taken to reflection [when any confusion or doubt arises about a truth]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

8) The final knowledge about which things are good and which things are bad, which actions are ugly and which actions are beautiful, is obtained only after they have been perceived by the senses and reports have arrived about them; if each side of them [that is, goodness and evil, beauty and ugliness regarding the objects and behaviors] is to be determined by the intellect and certain aspects are to be discovered, the only way to do this is to reflect about them. The same holds true of the beneficial and harmful actions.

9) The human being has been created on the basis of both nature and reason. What reason regards as beautiful is different from that which nature desires and what reason considers ugly is different from that which nature is repelled (or there is sometimes opposition and sometimes harmony between reason and nature). Therefore, one has to reflect and consider every matter in order to know the truth about its membership in one of the categories that we have mentioned.<sup>154</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

153 Here the reader learns that not only is the world wisely made to sustain for humanity, but that humanity has been charged with the moral responsibility to care for created beings.

154 See 6.2 (4) for further details on this conception.



### [1.3. Objections to the Validity of Sensory, Narrational and Rational Knowledge]<sup>155</sup>

In addition, let us speak of some doubts. These doubts hinder one whom Satan has overpowered. Through them, [Satan] leads him away from the obvious truth. Thus, our aim by this discourse is to establish that the factor that prompted this person to make his erroneous choice was his letting himself to be deceived by his enemy's [i.e., Satan's] trickery. It was not due to a shortcoming from God in providing evidence. *Strength comes from God alone.*

#### [1.3.1. Objection to the Validity of Sensory Knowledge and Responding to It]

Satan deceives the person who denies the truth of sensation, in order to prevent him from worshipping God, through the fact that it sometimes conflicts with the result of reflection. For example, one who has a flaw in his vision [cannot see well], people see self-contradictory things in their dreams, and they cannot see too distant or too small things. However, this stratagem of Satan does not work in keeping him away from pleasurable things and in preventing him from his own desires: he still stays away from painful things and preserves himself from plunging into fire and the sea. [Therefore, he is not sincere in his claim that sensory knowledge is invalid]. If he spoke that way because he really did not know, he would not have survived, he would have put himself in grave danger, and he would not have eaten. Thus, it has been established that the reason behind his claim is love of pleasure and addiction to lust. In addition, the variances and inconsistencies that he mentions about sensation are sufficient evidence that he is sufficiently aware of it to inform about its difference from the outcome of reflection. For us, all of [the above examples] are cases of sensation. Fault in the sense organ, being asleep, extreme distance and smallness are merely obstacles to reaching the truth of things. When these obstacles are removed, one reaches the truth. That which obligates difference [with reflection] is the due right of sensation and it is not possible to deny this due right.<sup>156</sup>

155 This section has been moved from where it is found in the manuscript (after 2:2), in which it disrupts the flow of the arguments about the nature of the world and God, to its logical location in the epistemological Introduction after outlining the three means of knowledge. This rearrangement was also adopted by Topaloğlu and Aruçi.

156 In other words, the fact that a conflict occurs with the result of rational reflection shows

### [1.3.2. Objection to the Validity of Narrational Knowledge and Responding to It]

The same rule applies to one who accepts sensory knowledge but denies reports. As a matter of fact, he denies reports because they may turn out to be lies after they spread. It has also been said: Were there no reports about the benefit of enjoying the delicious and desirable things, no sensible person would venture to try them. Likewise, it is possible to avoid harmful things without having to try them. That is only attained by reports. Such things as ways of earning, stratagems, and precautions that benefit and harm people's bodies and worldly lives are also known through reports. Thus, the reason that leads that one to deny the reports is that accepting the reports also requires abiding by some religious prohibitions and holding back the lower soul from its desires. Therefore, the reason for Satan to deceive this group is the same as for deceiving the first group: [i.e. due to surrendering to one's own desires].

Errors in sensation occur due to the accidental reasons that we have explained, and this situation did not prevent those who deny the reports from accepting sensation. Yet [their denial of reports] is just like the first group [who deny sensation]. This is because errors in reports are due to defects attached to the informer, which cause him to err.<sup>157</sup>

In addition, many reports appear to be true. Hence, whether they are true or false can only be known by the evidence that will reveal it. *It is God who leads to success.*

One who denies the epistemological value of reports is treated harshly and beaten in a way that hurts, so that he is forced to accept what can only be known through reports.<sup>158</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

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the epistemological weight that sensation ordinarily holds. Thus, such a conflict in exceptional circumstances cannot be used to undermine the senses in normal cases.

157 This second group do not deny sensation despite the occasions in which it is fallacious. But they deny reports with the same rationale, which is inconsistent.

158 Or: "forced to say what can only be known by report [i.e., to tell the person punishing him to stop.]"



### [1.3.3. Objection to the Validity of Rational Knowledge and Responding to It]

The attitude of one who accepts the knowledge of the senses and reports but denies the knowledge of inference is evaluated in the same way. That is to say, he is aware of the fact that there are various benefits and expected results in this world that he cannot know through senses and reports but can only know by inference. It is through inference that he surmises the accuracy of sensation and, similarly, whether reports are true or false.

In addition, one who denies the knowledge of inference is asked with regard to anything that sensory perception does not apply: "How do you know that?" If he answers, "Through reports", he will be asked how he knows whether the reports are true and false. This applies to anything pleasurable and harmful that is done or avoided.

In addition, necessity requires us to think about what we see and what we hear, so that it is known whether the origin of the world is temporal or eternal.

Moreover, there is no report or sensory information that prevents making inferences about anything; so, it is as if one takes this prohibition of inference on the basis of inference. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Finally, knowledge of a [specific] human being, a fire or anything witnessed a single time is only attained by inferring from what is known. Were inference not evidence, a person would never be able to deal with anyone.<sup>159</sup> Furthermore, he would not be able to accept the instruction of anyone, because there would be no evidence to acquaint him with who [the teacher] is. It is only possible [to receive instruction] once there is [evidence for the veracity of his teacher's] report. All of that is established by inference and it is required. *Strength comes from God alone.*

159 One only knows how to interact appropriately with a new acquaintance or a fresh instance of fire due to inference from past experience. See 2.3 (3) ii.

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**Chapter Two**

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**Enquiries of Divinity**

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## [2.1. Proofs for the Temporal Generation of the World]

Shaykh Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The proof for the temporal generation of beings<sup>160</sup> is the attestation by the three ways we have mentioned about how to know things.

### [2.1.1. Narrational Proofs]

The proof from reports about the temporal generation of the world is the fact that the following truth has been established to come from God in a way the like of which the human being is incapable of proving for anyone: God has informed us that He is the creator of everything, that He is the originator of the heavens and the earth, and that He has dominion over all that is in them. We have already explained the epistemological necessity of reports. No living being has ever claimed to be eternal, nor has pointed to a meaning indicating its eternity. On the contrary, if one claims that he is eternal, he himself and his companions necessarily know that he is lying, because they saw him when he was a child, and remember the beginning of his life. Therefore, it is necessary to say that living things are temporally generated. As for inanimate things, they are under the rule of the living. Thus, they are more worthy of being temporally generated.<sup>161</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

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160 Al-Māturīdī uses the word *al-a'yān* (sing. *'ayn*), meaning substances in the sense of particular things or beings. In most contexts, this means temporally generated bodies, such that the translation "bodily substances" is appropriate. A few passages suggest that God can be referred to as an "entity" (*'ayn*) insofar as He can be called a "thing that is not like things", see 2.7 (4), or will be visible in the Hereafter, see 2.17 (10) iv, though any similarity to bodies must be negated.

161 The principle that al-Māturīdī uses is that inanimate, or dead, things (*al-amwāt*) are in an important sense inferior in terms of their autonomy to the living things that are able to make use of them in various ways. Thus, if it can be shown that the living is temporally generated, *a fortiori* the inanimate will be too.

## [2.1.2. Sensory Proofs]

As for the attestation by the sensory knowledge to the temporal generation of the world, it is as follows:

1) We perceive with our senses that all beings are surrounded by necessity and built<sup>162</sup> upon need. Eternity is the condition for independence, because something is independent of others due to its eternity, while necessity and need render it dependent on others. So, it follows that the world is temporal.

2) Nothing knows its own beginning; even when it is perfect in terms of power and knowledge, it cannot fix its corrupted parts. This is the case if the thing in question is alive. If it is inanimate, the living has authority over it. Thus, it is established that both the living and the inanimate came into existence through something other than themselves. When the existence of this other is established, then temporal generation is required, because the notion of eternity eliminates the possibility of dependence on something else.

3) Different and contrary natures<sup>163</sup> are aggregated in all experienced beings. The reality of such natures in themselves is to repel and to become distant from each other. Hence, it is established that their aggregation occurs due to other than themselves. This shows that the experienced world is temporal.<sup>164</sup>

4) The world is composed of parts,<sup>165</sup> and it is known [by the senses] that most of its parts came into existence after they did not exist. Moreover,

162 Reading the undotted word in MS. Sr as *mabniyyan*.

163 Al-Māturīdī's affirmation of natures (*ṭabā'ī'*) with causal powers as constituents of all worldly bodies is an important part of his metaphysical system.

164 This argument, that the contrary action of individual natures is at odds with the observable patterns of aggregation in the world, is characteristic of al-Māturīdī's approach to natural theology. Similar ideas were espoused by al-Nazzām and, previously, John of Damascus (d. ca 750). See al-Khayyāt, *Kitāb al-intiṣār*, 45-47; Davidson, "John Philoponus as a Source of Medieval Islamic and Jewish Proofs of Creation," 373-74.

165 He uses the words *ajzā'* and *ab'ād* here as synonyms for expressing that the world is made of bodies with composite parts. See 2.19 (1). He holds the ontological position that these parts are composed of divergent natures (*ṭabā'ī'*), which are ultimately different combinations of "dispositional accidents" (*a'rāḍ*), see 4.8 (1). The bodies, as composites, are characterized by momentary "relational accidents" in terms of their states, as well as "vital accidents" in relation to their life, knowledge and power.



[the world's] growth, expansion and enlargement are known. Then, the same [temporal generation] applies to the whole of the world, because the aggregation of finite parts cannot become infinite.<sup>166</sup>

5) The world contains what is pure and filthy, small and big, beautiful and ugly, light and dark. These are the signs of change and disappearance, which in turn involve extinction and destruction. As is known, aggregation reinforces, strengthens and enlarges. The proof for this is the expansion [of entities]. Moreover, aggregation disappears at the time of separation. Thus, it has been established that separation is the sign of extinction.<sup>167</sup> It is impossible for something that may be extinguished to exist by itself. Therefore, it is necessary for the world to have a beginning.<sup>168</sup> There is no meaning [for the proponent of the eternal world] to say: "[That which is in the world] vanishes from sight, but it is not extinguished."<sup>169</sup> This is because the world's [existence] is known by observation, not by rational proofs; [its] eternity is claimed on the basis of it [i.e., observation],<sup>170</sup> so that [claim] lapses. In addition, we have established that this [reasoning] is unsound. There is no difference between the extinction of [a being's] life and between [the extinction of] its essence.<sup>171</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

He does not uphold *kalām* atomism by positing an indivisible part (*al-juz' alladhī lā yatajazza'*). See the Editor's Introduction.

- 166 This is a significant "mereological principle", which is typically used in *kalām* to secure the argument for the temporality of the world based on its accidents. See Shihadeh, "Mereology in *Kalām*," 9-11. It may be suggested, following Bertrand Russell, that this move commits the fallacy of composition, inferring from the finitude of the parts to the finitude of the whole. As pointed out by Bruce Reichenbach, this is an informal fallacy of content, not a formal fallacy. Reichenbach, "Cosmological Argument". That is, even if it cannot automatically be assumed that what is true for the parts is true for the whole, in the specific case of finitude it may be reasonable to suggest that a world containing only temporally generated parts cannot *in toto* be anything other than temporal.
- 167 When an entity is separated into its constituent parts (beyond the point defined by its essential attributes), it is extinguished.
- 168 In other words, because things change, they can be extinguished. If they can be extinguished, then they do not exist by themselves, but due to another. If that is the case, then they have a beginning.
- 169 That is, the eternal prime matter from which everything is formed. This amounts to a denial of extinction, and therefore the preceding argument.
- 170 Reading *bihi* [i.e., observation] with MS. Sv rather than *bihā* [i.e., rational proofs] as emended in TA, 78.
- 171 Al-Māturīdī here provides an additional argument against the position that something vanishing from sight is not actually extinguished because its matter has mere-



### [2.1.3. Rational Proofs]

The rational proof for the temporal generation of the world is based on the sensory evidence for its temporal generation. Namely:

1) Bodies are either moving or still and the two [states] are not combined.<sup>172</sup> Thus, objects are in motion half the time and at rest half the time. Everything that has a half is finite. Since these two cannot unite in eternity, one of them is temporal and since a temporal thing cannot be created in pre-eternity, the same is true for the other. [So, both motion and stillness are generated temporally.] This proves that the body, which may not be devoid of motion or stillness, has also been generated temporally.<sup>173</sup>

ly taken another form. His argument relies on the concept of essence (*dhāt*). The essence of an entity is its "essential nature", in other words the entity itself considered as a totality and with its complete set of essential attributes (see the Editor's Introduction). He provides the example of life, which is one of the essential attributes of living beings. His presentation of this example is extremely terse, but it seems to relate to ideas in his milieu, such as those of al-Kindī who writes: "By 'essential' I mean that which makes subsist (*muqawwim*) the essence of something: because it [the essential] exists, the being of the thing subsists and is stable, whereas when it [the essential] ceases to exist, the thing is destroyed and corrupted. An example of this is life: the living being subsists and persists through it, whilst it is corrupted and destroyed through its absence." Adamson and Pormann, *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, 27. A similar principle was also upheld by members of the Mu'tazila. See Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes*, 110. Al-Māturīdī thus reasons as follows: if the accident of life of a being, for instance a sheep, is extinguished, then that living sheep as an entity has also been extinguished. The body that remains is no longer a sheep, but a sheep carcass, as it no longer has the essence of a sheep. This change points to the reality of the phenomenon of extinction. Note that al-Māturīdī seemingly upholds a "conceptualist" notion of essence in which only particular things exist in the extra-mental world. See 2.7. (5) ii.

- 172 As discussed in the Editor's Introduction, al-Māturīdī's understanding of motion and stillness is that they are only applicable relative to a body's initial moment of existence in which it is neither moving nor still. He explicitly mentions this in 6.8 (15) and 4.7 (2). Thus, it is necessary to read him as meaning "bodies with [a prior] moment of existence are either moving or still" in every case in which he brings this point up. This clarification will not be made each time in the translation.
- 173 As it is known from observation that every body alternately possesses either motion or stillness, it is certain that at least one of these qualities is temporal. But if the other one was hypothetically possessed by an eternal body, it would not be possible for its temporal counterpart to replace it in that eternal state. Therefore, both must be temporal, and the same is true for all bodies.



2) Bodies are not devoid of stillness, motion or both of them [successively].<sup>174</sup> They are forced, subjugated and subordinated to their state of stillness and motion to benefit others. If this is the character of the substances<sup>175</sup> in the world, which are not described as living, then it is established that they are temporally generated, for they are not left alone in their own state; on the contrary, they are in a state of subjugation and subjection, and are employed to meet the needs of others. Since this is affirmed regarding the origin of the substances in the universe, the animate things that live on them and benefit from them – which are naturally dependent on needs and benefits – are more worthy of this quality [that is, of being temporally created].<sup>176</sup>

3) Another proof is that necessarily the world is either:

i) Past infinite in its states of aggregation and separation; motion and stillness; filth and purity; beauty and ugliness; increase and reduction. The fact that these are all temporal is known by both the senses and the intellect, for it is impossible for two opposites to unite [at the same time in the same place]. Therefore, two opposites must come one after the other, which involves temporal generation. All temporally generated things are under the rule of coming into existence after non-existence. The same holds true of things that are neither devoid of temporally generated things, nor prior to them. Or:

ii) Built from a source that did not have that quality [of past infinite states] and evolved into it despite the resistance of things. If this is the case, it has been established that the world is a temporal being and the view of the one who denies this is refuted. And if there is another [existent entity], such that the First is the creator of the world, then that is our view. He is the Originator, yet they have called Him prime matter.<sup>177</sup> If the First has

174 Reading MS. 6r as *aw humā*, which agrees with K, 12. The clarification that motion and stillness cannot characterize a body at the same time is made in the previous point and here in a marginal note on the manuscript. See 1.3. (7).

175 Al-Māturīdī uses the term *jawāhir* (sing. *jawhar*), which is here equivalent to *a'yān*.

176 Al-Māturīdī here unusually reverses his *a fortiori* argument, this time making animate things more worthy of temporal generation than the inanimate things that they depend on. It is difficult to see how he can coherently hold both versions of this argument.

177 The Arabic term is *hayūlā*, which comes from the Greek term *hyle*. See Ainsworth, "Form vs. Matter".

evolved into [the present situation of the world], then the First has gone and this world has replaced it. It follows that this world has been originated, because it is not the First. Since the First is destroyed when it turns into the Second, it is also originated. Additionally, in order for a thing to come into existence from another, either:

- a) The former must be hidden in the latter and then appear; or
- b) Be originated in it, so that it is generated and comes out; or
- c) The First disappears to be replaced by the Second.

Hence, the First is like the child [i.e., under (a) or (b)] and something put in a container [i.e., under (c)].<sup>178</sup> But it is impossible for a thing to exist in something else that is several times larger than it. Therefore, the view that the human being exists in the sperm, and the tree in the seed, is false.<sup>179</sup> The same is the case for the doctrine of the manifestation [of what is hidden] by potency. That requires the temporality of the thing's essence, because the potency [involved] is the causality of another.<sup>180</sup> When [something] comes to exist by the [existentiating] act, not by potency, or the First disappears like the sperm followed by the organism, and so on, then the First is destroyed leaving no trace of itself.<sup>181</sup> The Second comes into existence with no trace of the First remaining in it. This explanation requires both the First and the Second to be temporal.

178 The context of the positions that al-Māturīdī discusses implies that he is providing examples for different cases. The child is generated in the mother and then comes out, whereas putting something in a container replaces whatever was in it before. Al-Māturīdī is here at first providing logical possibilities and not choosing between them as to correctness.

179 This is a refutation of position (a).

180 The potency (*quwwa*) that he is envisaging may be the form that on a hylomorphic account manifests substances from underlying prime matter. See Adamson and Pormann, *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindi*, 318. He presumes that the thing in question must be essentially temporal for its manifestation to occur due to the potency of another.

181 This deals with positions (b) and (c), showing that they require the First (in the sense of the prime matter posited by the interlocutor) to be temporal.



### [2.1.3.1. The Difference Between Eternity and Everlastingness]

If someone says: If, according to you, beings can be everlasting through non-everlasting things in the Hereafter, why is it not the case that beings can be eternal through non-eternal things?

It is said: There are several reasons for this:

1) Because in this case, a contradiction arises, for the meaning of temporal generation is the coming of a thing into existence after it did not exist. It is contradictory to say that a thing is eternal though it exists only through another which precedes it.<sup>182</sup> The meaning of everlastingness is existence through the recommencement of time, no matter whether another coexists with it or not. Therefore, the notions of eternity and everlastingness are different.

2) The doctrine that you mentioned that beings will be everlasting [in the Hereafter] is traditional (*sam'i*). If you accept this religious knowledge, you must also accept that beings are temporally generated, because we know this through religious knowledge. Or you do not accept religious knowledge and thus your attempt to use religious knowledge as an argument to deny the temporality of beings becomes groundless. *Help is from God alone.*

3) Again, if a thing exists through another that precedes it, that other also exists through still another, and if this continues *ad infinitum*, the whole never exists. But this is not the case with the notion of everlastingness. For example, someone says: "Do not eat anything before you eat another thing; and so on as a condition for each other thing." In this case, one cannot ever eat anything. If he says, however: "Whenever you eat a bite, eat another", he eats forever. The condition of eternity is the first case. Doubling in counting is compared to this, because no number can ever exist unless a beginning is accepted from which the number begins. If the number begins, it continues to exist as long as the number increases, and then increases continuously. *Strength comes from God alone.*

182 The phrase used in the Arabic text is as follows: "*fa-man lā yasbiqūhu fa-fihi ḥaḳīqiyya*." Kholeif (K, 13), followed by Topaloğlu and Aruḳi (TA, 80), pointed out in a footnote that the phrase is problematic, and I agree with them. However, one paragraph later, the phrase "*wa-ayḍān in al-shay' idhā lam yakun illā bi-ghayr yataqaddamahu wa-dhālika al-shart...*" seems to be first mentioned above and then repeated below. Hence, I have translated it accordingly (Translator).

4) The beginning of counting is mentioned for every number, because by it that number has been reached, whereas its end is not mentioned. Therefore, [the notions of eternity and everlastingness] are different.

5) If we assume that no body exists and that there may exist another accident before every accident, it becomes impossible for any accident to come into existence because no beginning has been made for it. Conversely, it is possible for accidents to exist [successively] forever without end. The same condition applies to that which has never been devoid of accidents [i.e., the bodily object].<sup>183</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

6) Every motion or aggregation that we point to is the end of that which has elapsed of its kind. Hence, it is impossible for the past to have an end without it having a beginning. *Strength comes from God alone.*

7) It is possible for a bodily object to be characterized by everlastingness with a single instance of endurance, even if that [accident of] endurance does not endure. But a bodily object cannot be characterized [by eternity] due to a single instance of temporal generation that cannot be free from non-existence.<sup>184</sup> Hence, more than one instance of temporal generation is also an obstacle to being qualified by eternity.<sup>185</sup> The occurring of everlastingness to the bodily object is a cause that renders it everlasting, and its everlastingness continues by depending on the successive instances of everlastingness in it. However, the cause for the eternity of the object is not the generation of an accident in it. Therefore, the generation of the accident

183 Since a bodily object persists thanks to accidents of endurance (*baqā'*) that occur one after the other, this temporal generation may bring about its everlastingness. In other words, the temporal generation that occurs in an object does not prevent its everlastingness. Yet such temporal generation contradicts its eternity, because it requires a beginning point. As a result, though the body can perpetually persist after the generation of endurance, it can only exist before it in its first moment (*Translator*).

184 Reading MS. 7r as "*lā yakhlū 'anhu al-'adam*," rather than the incoherent "*lā yakhlū 'anhu bi-l-'adam 'anhu*".

185 He again compares the two cases of everlastingness and eternity. In the former case, the everlastingness of a body starts from the initial instance of endurance (i.e., the body lasting into a second moment) and does not require the accident of endurance itself to endure. Thus, even after a single moment of endurance something could begin to be classified as everlasting (so long as it never leaves existence). But something with even a single instance of temporal generation (let alone more) cannot be eternal, as any temporal generation is, by definition, the emergence of something from non-existence, which is the opposite of eternity.



here is not like the generation of the accident in the case of everlastingness. For this reason, it is impossible for a bodily object to precede the generation of the accident. *God alone leads to success.*

[Responding to an objection concerning the possibility of a body preceding its accidents:]

Some people, who maintain that [the bodily object exists before the occurrence of the accidents in it], object to us by saying: "Nothing can exist without a color; but it does not follow that [the body] is [composed from] a color." This statement is meaningless.<sup>186</sup> If temporal generation means the coming of a thing into existence after it did not exist, then if what is other than the color [i.e., the rest of the body] cannot be separated from it<sup>187</sup> and has this quality in it [i.e., being colored], then this ruling [of temporality] also applies to it.<sup>188</sup> Moreover, color is not a color because of a determinant cause<sup>189</sup> in the object colored with it. That is why the two [i.e., color and colored object] are different.<sup>190</sup> However, the body in general is not prior to the colors collectively, because it cannot exist without color; but it can precede individual colors. The same holds true for the instances of temporal generation.

186 The statement is meaningless, because as he goes on to show, color is an essential attribute of any body.

187 The phrase that al-Māturīdī uses for the concept of "inseparability" is *ghayr mufāriq*. The same phrase occurs in 3.4 when explaining that a being subject to changing temporal states cannot be free from them, which is inimical to divine transcendence. It also occurs in 4.8 (5) when discussing the doctrine of the Dahrīs and the inseparable relationship between prime matter and the power that transforms it. For application of this concept to God and His attributes, see under 2.12.3 (8).

188 In other words, if everything must have a color, then color (though not any given color) must be a constituent of each body from the first moment of its generation, and each color must exist within a body. As discussed already, this class of "dispositional accidents" differs from that of the "relational accidents" discussed under 1.3 (7) below.

189 The word used is *ma'nā*, which in such contexts does not denote "meaning", but "determinant cause", or that which causes a body to be described with a specific quality. See Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes*, 12.

190 In contemporary terms, al-Māturīdī holds to a constituent ontology, in which the composite bodily object is colored due to the presence of a modifying trope. That is, a color property, for instance redness, makes a given body red; conversely, it is not that color because of any other determinant cause within the body. See Koons and Pickavance, *The Atlas of Reality*, 167.

### [2.1.3.2. Continuation of the Rational Proofs for the Temporality of the World]

1) One who says, "Nothing is known to be created *ex nihilo*" considers existence to be no more than the things perceived by the senses. Yet cognition itself is outside of sensation. Likewise, the judgments of what is possible and impossible.<sup>191</sup> Nor do we know through sensation what is claimed to be separation rather than annihilation. But such a person professes it, and we do the same.<sup>192</sup> In clearer terms, we find within ourselves the intellect, the hearing, the sight, the spirit, and so on from which one does not grasp that he was created. Therefore, [the existence of all these non-sensory things] invalidates the approach that [sees the world of existence as consisting only of the things perceived by the senses, rejecting the creation *ex nihilo*]. In addition, no one has reported that the world is eternal or he himself is eternal from the substance of the world. Therefore, the only way to know it is rational inference.

2) We know that no writing happens without a writer, nor does separation take place without a separator. Such is the case with joining, stillness and motion. Therefore, the same must apply to the world altogether, because it is both unified and separated. Indeed, the marvelous art in the composition of the [entire] world is even more elevated. Therefore, [the world] is more worthy of being separated and joined by an external agent. Also, in visible contexts, the acts of composition and writing follow their causes. The same holds true of the whole world, since it comes under the meaning that I mentioned. *God alone leads to success.*

3) Were it for us to undertake comprehensive research on [the temporal nature of the world], it would go beyond human capacity, because its every sensible and audible part involves a clear sign that it is temporally generated. For example, its being unable to know its beginning, how to fix what is corrupted, how to create something like itself, how to protect itself,

191 Literally, "the saying, "It is possible" and "It is impossible"" (*al-qawl bi-yajūz wa-lā yajūz*). This could also be rendered as permissible and impermissible, though the context makes it more likely that al-Māturīdī is referencing modal notions.

192 The person who denies *ex nihilo* creation and relies on the senses makes use of the intellect to determine that things are split into constituent parts, rather than just being annihilated and seamlessly replaced. Al-Māturīdī here affirms that he also holds the position that things are broken up into parts.



or transform itself away from its substance [are aspects of the world that indicate that it is temporally generated]. In addition, the world contains filthy, ugly, worthless and base elements. If [the world's] governor was not other than [the world], it would be impossible for the universe to be like this. *God alone leads to success.*

4) It is known that motion, stillness, joining and separation are something other than the body, because a bodily object joins when it is separate and halts when it is moving. If a bodily object was inherently like that [i.e., joined or moving], it could not accept the opposites of these states due to the body remaining in its condition.<sup>193</sup> Annihilation and endurance are assessed and interpreted in the same way, because beings are brought into existence without enduring and without being annihilated at different times. From this, it follows that the bodily objects themselves are other than annihilation and endurance. Likewise, if one refers to the endurance or annihilation of a thing, he means by one of them something different from what he means by the other. Thus, it is established that annihilation and endurance are two contraries that [alternatively] occur [to the body].

While many of the Mu'tazila accept this [i.e., that bodies assume opposite states due to an agent extraneous to them] in the first case [i.e., movement, stillness, joining and separation], they reject it in the context of endurance and annihilation. However, their view is wrong because in that case the body would differentiate itself by accepting it [i.e., endurance and annihilation]. If this [i.e., the differentiation of bodies by themselves] and the endurance of bodies by themselves were possible, it would be also possible for them to exist without an external agent. This result is more in line with the Mu'tazilite [theological] view, because they do not accept [a distinct creative action] that is other than the world, which issues from God towards the totality of the world, and brings the world into existence.<sup>194</sup>

193 These are all examples of al-Māturīdī's "relational accidents". That is, they are accidents that characterize the momentarily state of a body to account for change. To understand such accidents, it is necessary to consider the state of the body relative to the previous moment. So, for example, a body can only be characterized with motion in a second moment in which it is in a different spatial location relative to a first moment. See the Editor's Introduction.

194 In other words, the Mu'tazila relegate the act of creation to the object of creation, i.e., the world itself (*Translator*).

This is because they attribute the will and act of creation to the world; according to them, there was the essence of God and there was no world. Apart from the coming of the world into existence, nothing [such as the act of creation by God] took place. Therefore, the world has come into existence by itself and subsists by itself. And this impairs the oneness of God.<sup>195</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

It has been clarified that [bodies and the states that occur to them] are distinct. Some of [the theologians] call it "accident" and others "quality". It is incumbent upon one to accept the linguistic conventions on this matter, because the intention by naming is to inform and convey the intended meaning to the addressee. Whatever performs this function is sufficient. In addition, names are not known by the intellect and reasoning [on the contrary, they are known by means of reports.]

We have a similar attitude when considering the incorrectness of al-Ka'bi's<sup>196</sup> statement: "Since it is established that it is not a body, it has become clear that it is an accident." Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: That [i.e., al-Ka'bi's statement] is only necessary when it is accepted that what is other than the body from amongst creation is [named] an accident. However, in the Book of God, the term "*arad*" also refers to the substances of things, as in the following verse: "You want temporary worldly property

195 Al-Māturīdī criticises the Mu'tazilī position, which holds that God has a simple essence, and therefore denies distinct divine attributes, such as God's will, and divine action, such as His creation of the world. From al-Māturīdī's perspective, this means that they deny the ontological basis for the world's existence in God. He argues, therefore, that the Mu'tazilī position implies that the world has come into existence and subsists by itself, invalidating God's status as the creator (*Translator*).

196 Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Ka'bi (d. 319/931) is the single most important interlocutor for al-Māturīdī within *The Book of Monotheism* and a major target of both theological arguments and personal criticism. Al-Ka'bi is considered the major figure associated with the Baghdādī Mu'tazilā in al-Māturīdī's era. His extant works include an extensive doxographical and theological text, *Kitāb al-maqālāt*, as well as a kind of appendix to it, *Uyūn al-masā'il wa-l-jawābāt*. Al-Māturīdī makes clear in some places that he is responding to texts written by al-Ka'bi. His habit, after mentioning al-Ka'bi a single time at the beginning of a given section or discussion, is to expect the reader to be able to follow those pronouns that refer to al-Ka'bi and those which refer to himself over long dialectical sequences. This makes his debates with al-Ka'bi one of the trickiest parts of the text to decode. For a biographical summary of al-Ka'bi, see van Ess, "Abū'l-Qāsem Ka'bi."



(*'arad al-dunyā*)<sup>197</sup> and "If there was a nearby worldly property (*'aradan qarīban*)."<sup>198</sup> Accordingly, naming the states of the body "qualities" is closer to the Islamic terminology.<sup>199</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

## [2.2. Proofs for the Existence of a Creator for the World]

Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: As for the proofs that there is a creator for the world, they are as follows:

1) On the basis of the explanations we have offered and because no part of the world is composed or separated by itself in the visible realm, it has been established that the world came into existence after it did not exist. Thus, it has been established that this joining and separation occurred due to an agent extraneous to the world. *God alone leads to success.*

2) Secondly, if the world came into existence by itself, no time would be more suitable for it than any other time, no state would be more preferable than any other state, and no quality would be worthier than any other quality. Since the world has various times, states and qualities, it follows that the world did not come into existence by itself.

3) If everything could possess the most beautiful states and the best qualities, bad and ugly things would disappear. The existence of the bad and ugly proves that they exist because of an agent extraneous to themselves.<sup>200</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

197 Q. 8:67.

198 Q. 9:42.

199 Adopting al-Ka'bi's principle would mean applying the term *'arad* to accidents, but as shown through Qur'anic quotations, the term can also be used for substances. Hence, al-Māturīdī prefers the term *ṣifa*.

200 This is al-Māturīdī's distinctive argument for God from the existence of natural evil. It is open to various interpretations. See Pessagno, "The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought," 74; Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, 72-73. Given comments made in 2.14 (3) and 3.1 (7), the following reading may be most plausible. If the world was the result of self-arrangement, it would be perfectly harmonious and lacking any kind of tension or disequilibrium. Yet the world contains imbalance and evils, which suggests that they have been introduced by an external agent, God, for wise purposes. See Harvey and Jalajel, "Wise Design and the Metaphysics of Natural Evil: Al-Māturīdī's Divinely Existential and Causally Coherent World" (forthcoming).

4) The beings in the world are of two types: the animate and the inanimate. No animate thing can know its beginning, nor can it create a thing like itself, and even when it is strong and mature, it cannot repair the part that has been corrupted. Thus, it has been established that the animate thing exists because of an agent extraneous to it. The inanimate is more worthy of this.<sup>201</sup>

5) Of necessity, every substance in the world cannot escape the accidents that it bears. The accidents that are related to the [substance] cannot subsist without it. Thus, it has been proven that both of the two [i.e., substances and accidents] are in need of each other, so the claim that [the world] exists by itself is refuted. [Rather it is] in need of other than it [i.e., God] by which it is brought into being and sustained. *Strength comes from God alone.*

6) In every substance, there are combined contrary natures, whose innate qualities are to move away from each other, and which it is impossible that they combine on their own. Thus, it has been established that there is an agent who composes those natures. *God alone leads to success.*

7) Every [living] substance is in need of nutrition and other things on which it can subsist and survive. It is not possible for it to know on its own what its survival depends on and how to extract and obtain them. Thus, it is established that it achieves this knowledge through one all-knowing and all-wise, and not by itself. *Salvation and protection are only from God.*

8) If the world came into existence by itself, it would endure by itself, and this would be on a uniform course. Yet, it is not on a uniform course. Thus, this situation indicates that the world came into existence because of an agent external to it.

9) If the world came into existence by itself, its coming into existence by itself would either be: (i) after its existence, so that the claim that it came into existence by itself would be disproved, because it came into existence due to something else; or (ii): before its existence, yet how can a thing bring itself into existence before it exists? Also, if it came into existence by itself before it existed, one could consider it non-existent. Thus, it would be

201 See 1.1 and 1.2 (2) above.



a non-existent agent. This too is impossible [since something that does not exist cannot act]. The case of building, writing and shipbuilding testifies to what we are saying, i.e., they can only come into existence through an existent agent. The same holds true of the subject we are speaking about [namely, the world]. *God alone leads to success.*

10) Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The most fundamental evidence [that the world came into existence through an external agent after it did not exist] is as follows. There is astonishing wisdom and a wondrous sign in everything we see in the world. Even sages<sup>202</sup> are unable to grasp the essence of this wisdom and sign, nor how it emerged, each of them seeing that he is incapable of comprehending its truth despite the wisdom and knowledge he possesses. This necessity and others involve a clear sign of the wisdom of their Creator. *Strength comes from God alone.*

11) If it were possible for the world to come into existence at once by itself, it would also be possible for it to disappear all at once. The world does not perish, but changes, and these changes [within its parts] are caused by agents other than themselves, for example the death of the living, the separation of the compound, the growth of the small, the cleaning of the filthy always happen due to other things that come about. The same is the case with the whole world. In other words, it is impossible for the world to come into existence without an external agent. Were this to be possible, the colors of clothing could change by themselves, not by dyes, and ships could sail in the water on their own. Since this is not the case, there must be someone who knows how to build and bring them into existence. The same holds true of the whole world. *Strength comes from God alone.*

12) It is not possible for the world to exist by itself due to signs that its present state is known, and it is itself under power. It is impossible for a being like the world to exist through a powerless and ignorant thing. So how about through a non-existent thing? *God alone leads to success.*

The proof for the world's generation *ex nihilo* is the fact that it came into existence after it did not exist, which we have already explained.

202 Or: "wise men" (*al-ḥukamā*).

### 2.2.1. Enquiry [The Creator of the World is One]

Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The evidence for the fact that the one who created the world after it did not exist is one, and not more, comes from tradition, the intellect, and the world's attestation to being created.

#### [2.2.1.1. Proofs from Tradition for the Unity of the Creator of the World]

They are as follows:

1) Despite the disagreement among themselves, people have agreed on the One, because even those who hold the view of multiplicity have in fact adopted unity since one is the name for the beginning of number, as well as for glory, authority, loftiness and superiority. For example, it is said as an expression: "Such-and-such is unique [lit. one] in his time, incomparable in loftiness, superiority and majesty." The numbers other than one can only be numbers [and cannot refer to loftiness, etc.]. Numbers are unlimited in terms of their individuals. If it is accepted that the counted really exists, the number is infinite, so the world must also be infinite. This is because if something could come into existence for every number, the whole world would be infinite due to [an infinity of] temporal things, which is an impossible result.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, one can argue that any [other] number that is indicated can be increased or decreased. Since no number has a truth that it does not share with others as a number, no certain number can be pronounced [as to how many creators there are].<sup>204</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

2) No mention has been made that anyone other than the deity known by monotheists ever claimed divinity whilst pointing to an effect of his action that indicates his lordship. Nothing has been found to possess a determinant cause that would allow him to be distinguished from other beings. No one other than the deity known to monotheists sent messengers with

203 From the fact that al-Māturīdī thinks that a corresponding existent cannot be realized for every number without contradiction, it can be inferred that he holds that actually infinite collections cannot occur in the world.

204 Al-Māturīdī argues that if any number other than one is posited for creators of the world, it becomes impossible to determine if it is correct instead of one more or less than it.



miracles that vanquished and dazzled the intellect. Therefore, it is established that it is mere delusion and devilish whispers to say that [there is a god other than the one whom monotheists recognize].

3) The fact that the messengers produced miracles is a proof for the unity of the creator of the world because anyone who witnesses these miracles is forced to accept the following: if miracles were the act of a being with partners, these partners would prevent the messengers from performing miracles because miracles cancel the lordship and divinity of the supposed partners.<sup>205</sup> However, there are no such partners, and the prophets were not prevented from performing miracles. Additionally, if those hypothetical partners had wanted, they could have found many helpers among those who were arrogant and obstinate against the messengers to show their own miracles. So, it has been established that showing miracles is unique to the messengers, for the only true deity and creator of creatures is the One, the Vanquisher, who prevents every obstinate person from feigning, let alone actually performing, miracles. *Strength comes from God alone.*

#### [2.2.1.2. Rational Proofs for the Unity of the Creator of the World]

They are as follows:

1) If there were more than one creator for the world, the world could come into existence only with their agreement. This, however, necessitates the corruption and disappearance of lordship.

2) What one of those who are referred to as creators wants to affirm, the other wants to deny, and what one wants to bring into existence, the other wants to make non-existent. The same is true of sustaining and annihilating. This causes contradiction and opposition. Thus, the very existence of the world indicates that the creator of the world is one and its administration is harmonious.

205 Al-Māturīdī frequently uses "lordship" (*rubūbiyya*) and "divinity" (*ulūhiyya*), either separately or together for greater emphasis. He does not uphold a clear terminological distinction with his employment of the words and they are treated as basically synonymous, with the overall sense of "God's unique divine status".

3) Kings traditionally fight each other and try their best to subdue all other kings to gain kingship, while preventing the others from exercising their rule and manifesting their authority. But there is no such [struggle or hindrance taking place in the world], rather the exclusive sovereignty of God, the Mighty and the Wise, is in effect. Thus, it has been established that He is the One. This [explanation] is the interpretation of the following verse: "Say: If there were other gods with Him, as they say, they would seek a way to overcome the Owner of the Throne."<sup>206</sup> The first explanation [in (2)] expresses the meaning of God's word: "If there were gods other than God in the heavens and on the earth, [the heavens and the earth] would certainly have been corrupted."<sup>207</sup>

4) If there were another god along with God, the other would reveal his wisdom and separate his act from the true act of God, thus making his power and authority known by his own deed. Since he did not do so, it is established that God is one in divinity and single in lordship. This explanation of ours is the meaning of God's word: "There is no other god with Him. Otherwise, each god would have taken away what he created."<sup>208</sup> Again, this is the meaning of God's words: "Or did the polytheists find partners who create as He created?"<sup>209</sup>

5) The agreement between the supposed gods indicates powerlessness and ignorance. Also, if there were an agreement, one of them would be justified in claiming that the creatures belonged to him inasmuch as he subjugates the others and brings them under his power and creation. *God alone leads to success.*

6) If there were another god with God, he should either be capable of doing something that he could hide from God or not. The same is true for God the Almighty. If both were capable of such a thing, both would have rendered the other ignorant, abolishing the meaning of lordship. If neither is capable of it, both will be incapable of it. Powerlessness, however,

<sup>206</sup> Q. 17:42.

<sup>207</sup> Q. 21:22.

<sup>208</sup> Q. 23:91.

<sup>209</sup> Q. 13:16. The term "polytheism" has been used to translate *shirk* and its related terms rather than "associationism" etc. This reflects al-Māturīdī's frequent polemical insistence that even groups such as the Mu'tazila are violating the appropriate standard of monotheistic belief.



destroys divinity. Alternatively, only one of the two will be capable of it. In this case, the one who has the power over it is the lord, and the one who does not is the servant, as knowledge of the unseen is the knowledge of lordship. Whoever lacks this knowledge is a servant.

7) Each of the two supposed gods either can or cannot prevent what the other wishes to do to a third being. In both cases, the possibility arises that both of them are powerless and incapable. Yet, weakness destroys lordship; or [as a third alternative] only one of the two can prevent the other. So, he alone is the Lord Almighty.

### [2.2.1.3. Cosmological Proofs for the Unity of the Creator of the World]

They are as follows:

1) If the world had more than one creator, the administration of the world would have changed hands between them. For example, the changing of the seasons, whereby one ruled the winter, the other the summer; one the growing of crops, the other their ripening; one would arrange the works of the heaven, the other that of the earth; one led the sun, the other the moon and stars; one was concerned with the food of the people, the other with the subsistence of the animals. All of these continue on the same course and depend on a single type of administration, and that course and administration also occurs within the framework of a single system that cannot be realized with two rulers. Hence, it is necessary to conclude the oneness of the creator. *It is only God who leads to success.*

2) Although the kinds of beings in the world are diverse and far from each other, such as the sky and the earth; the different regions of the earth; and the different sustenance of their people; all these different kinds of beings are united in benefits. Thus, all the species emerging from the ground come into existence through the causes of the sky, the needs of all the peoples of the countries are spread over all parts of the earth, and the livelihood of human beings is tied to various earnings. All affairs revolve in this way. If all these arrangements were the work of more than one [deity], despite such difference in the world, the benefits [of the kinds of beings in the world]<sup>210</sup> might not

210 Reading *manāfi'uhā* in accordance with MS. 10v and K, 22, rather than *manābi'uhā* (its sources) as emended in TA, 88.

return to the one among the creatures to whom the world belonged [i.e., humanity]. So, it has been established that the governor of all these is one. This is also the case in the entry, one into the other, of the night, day and hours in accordance with needs. This – God knows best – is the meaning of the verse, "You cannot see any inconsistency in the creation of the Most Merciful."<sup>211</sup> In addition, the bodily objects, that is, the substances, have six sides. Therefore, it has been established that the ruler of everything, despite the diversity of genera, is one, and thus the whole universe is united under a single meaning and purpose. *Strength comes from God alone.*

3) No bodily substance possesses on its own a single determinant cause, such as being only harmful or beneficial, only filthy or clean, only blessing or trial. On the contrary, a thing that is considered filthy is clean in another aspect<sup>212</sup> and for someone else. The same is true for other qualities. The states of things are also like this: things are not useful in all cases, nor are they harmful in all cases. Thus, it is established that the ruler of all these is one, and that ruler combines in each thing aspects of benefit and harm, making nothing one kind. For if beings consisted of one kind, it could be argued that each being exists due to an origin that goes back to its substance,<sup>213</sup> or due to the governance of a number [of gods], each controlling a side and thereby leading to mutual contradiction. *Strength comes only from God.*

4) Substances are all observed to exist within the bounds of bodies, in which contrary natures are united. The due right of these natures is to separate and move away from each other because of the opposition between them. Therefore, if the bodies were to remain alone with their nature, all beings would be destroyed. Hence, it is established that there is one ruler who subtly unites them, preventing one nature from harming another through wondrous wisdom that minds cannot comprehend. For if

<sup>211</sup> Q. 67:3.

<sup>212</sup> Al-Māturīdī uses the technical term *wajh*, which can also be translated as "configuration": "a concept that includes the totality of all the relevant factors, or circumstances (*qarīna*), that accompany and contextualize the act." Shihadeh, "Theories of Ethical Value in *Kalām*," 393.

<sup>213</sup> This probably refers to a materialist conception in which some kind of primal elements would be posited as the source for beings. If something was only characterized by a single kind of substance, it could be explained as coming from the corresponding element. Yet as things have multiple aspects, this cannot be the case.



these [natures] were due to more than one ruler, difference and opposition would prevail among the natures. This is the same way that agents desire to obstruct others and the work of others in order to settle their own affairs. *Salvation is only from God.*

5) We can combine the two perspectives and explain the cosmological proof in terms of states and acts as follows. As for states, they are either equal (or different) in all the meanings of lordship. If the states are equal, this equality is a single quality termed "number", which results in them preventing one another. If the states are different, the most perfect state is worthy of lordship. As for the acts, the whole world is in harmony, despite the contrast and opposition between the natures; it is as if [the contrary natures] are similars supporting each other, such that the existence of one assists the other to endure.<sup>214</sup> If the contrary natures are as I have said, then it has been established that this joining despite opposition is only possible thanks to a wise, knowledgeable and subtle ruler whose rule cannot be challenged and whose decree cannot be opposed. *Strength comes only from God.*

#### [2.2.1.4. There Is None Similar To God]

1) The belief that God is one and divinity belongs to him has been proven. However, the unity of God is not like the unity of number, because each "one" in terms of numbers has a half and fractions. Accordingly, one should say that God is exalted above similars and opposites, because to say that a thing has an opposite negates its deity; similarity also negates its unity. For all creatures are in the category of similars and opposites. These two are the most prominent features of the possibility of annihilation and non-existence, and the abolition of unity from creatures.

God is one without similitude. He is eternal and self-subsistent, and has no opposite, nor equal. This is the interpretation of His saying, "Nothing is like Him"<sup>215</sup>. The basis of this is that everything that has a likeness is included in the category of numbers. The minimum number is two.<sup>216</sup>

214 This shows that al-Māturidī holds natures to persist over time within the bodies that they constitute. It is their subtle combination by God that makes them mutually supporting within their bodies.

215 Q. 42:11.

216 This is based on the view of al-Kindī who followed Aristotle in holding that one is a unit, but not a number, which must be a multiplicity. See Adamson and Pormann,

Everything that has an opposite is in the category of annihilation, because its opposite destroys it. Accordingly, everything except God has an opposite that causes its destruction, and everything has a similar that is equivalent to it and becomes a pair with it.<sup>217</sup> The summary of the interpretation of His word "one"<sup>218</sup> is that God is one in greatness, loftiness, omnipotence and sovereignty; He is one through the uniqueness of lacking similars or opposites. Therefore, the view that He is body or accident is wrong, as they return to the similarity of things. Since this is established, it follows that the attributes peculiar to God are not used for Him in the same sense as they are used for creatures. *God alone leads to success.*

2) The Mushabbiha [i.e., Anthropomorphists] displayed obstinacy in this matter [that is, in using the attributes of creatures about God], which is the reason for the deviation of those who deviated. [In clearer terms], this person imagined that what is possible for the sensible things is also possible for God. In fact, some of them regarded Him as a bodily substance, denied the creator of the world, and claimed that the world has been as it was [in eternity]. Some people [who failed to make a distinction between God and the world] regarded the world as the substratum of temporally generated things, denying that the world was temporally generated, and arguing that things other than the world emerged through the power of the world. These are the people who hold the view of prime matter. In the face of these doctrines, it was incumbent upon Muslims to profess that God necessarily exists.<sup>219</sup> They defended this view, again negating what is possible for other than Him due to differentials in essences and divergence in qualities or

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*The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, 44. It appears to conflict with al-Māturīdī's earlier discussion in 2.2.1.1 (1) in which he seems to accept that one is the first number.

217 For instance, if motion enters a body, it destroys stillness, and vice versa. But motion in one body is exactly like motion in another. God does not have either kind of property.

218 Al-Māturīdī does not here cite a specific Qur'anic verse, but he is clearly referring to verses, such as Q. 2:163: "Your deity is one deity" (*wa-ilāhukum ilāhun wāhid*).

219 This statement, in Arabic "*wa-l-muslimūn lazimahum al-qawl bi-hastiyyatihi darūratan*," is significant as an early expression of the metaphysical necessity of God's existence prior to the dominant expression of *wājib al-wujūd* in the tradition most closely associated with Ibn Sīnā. Though, as to be expected from his era, al-Māturīdī's overall discussion is not separated from the question of divine eternity, the paragraph that follows shows the extent to which al-Māturīdī's target is the negation of contingency to God, of which temporality is just one kind.



change and transformation due the occurrence of increase and decrease in them. If some beings [other than God] are constant, they are the kind that are receptive [to transformation and change]. We should also point out that such a substance's constancy is susceptible to:<sup>220</sup>

- i) Subjection in perpetual movement or stillness.
- ii) The possibility of its opposite, which is the bane of the existent thing, because it involves the possibility of annihilation.
- iii) The existence of similars that deprive it of perfection and completeness; or
- iv) Establishing an end and limit, which requires concepts such as being more complete and incomplete, more sufficient and less sufficient.

These [four] aspects are among the indications that the world is temporally generated and are among the proof that it has a creator. If the creator of the world had [such attributes] that indicate that the world is temporally created and has a creator, that which relates to others in this respect would also relate to Him [i.e., such a being could not, in reality, be the world's creator]. In this vein is the corruption of the world and its attestation to the existence of a wise and knowledgeable creator, who is exalted above having similars and opposites. In addition, beings other than Him contain temporality in every aspect. If they were like Him, either He would not be eternal, or they would not be temporal. *Strength comes only from God.*

It is not possible for creatures to be similar in every respect, for otherwise creatures would be identical.<sup>221</sup> On the contrary, creatures are similar to each other in some respects, and dissimilar in others. Were God to be described as resembling other beings in one respect, He would resemble them in that respect just as a creature resembles other creatures, because that is the similarity between them. *Strength comes only from God.*

220 The constancy of things within the world is not absolute but merely relative due to these four aspects of contingency, none of which apply to God.

221 This point relies on a version of the Identity of Indiscernibles, later formulated by Leibniz. See Forrest, "The Identity of Indiscernibles".

### [2.2.1.5. Affirmation of the Divine Attributes Does not Require Similarity]

Shaykh Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: To affirm that God has names and attributes does not necessitate any similarity between Him and other beings, due to negating the realities of creatures from Him, such as [their temporal] isness and substantiality. The reason why the names are needed is that the divine essence can only be expressed, and the due right of lordship can only be attributed to it through them. This is because unseen things are only known through the indication of the visible. Then, if God is desired to be described with loftiness and majesty, this is the way of knowledge and expression in the visible world. For we only know to name by that which we see, and we only know to refer to that which we perceive with our senses. If we could say anything other than what we see and hear, we would. However, when we employ the names and attributes lying in our sensation to refer to God, we dismiss the illusion of similarity and say, for example: "God is the Knower, but not like other knowers." There is a similar case in all the names and attributes we use regarding God. *It is God who leads to success.*

It should be noted that our mind envisages the similarity between two things, not based on the expression of the language, but because we have already known the similarity between two objects<sup>222</sup> and two acts, and our imagination refers to this similarity during naming. Even if each of the two things did not have its own unique name and quality that allows it to be recognized and characterized, our minds could still establish [a relationship of similarity between the two]. Since God the Almighty, within the framework of our belief in His uniqueness, does not resemble those things that are known to us in the context of naming individual beings, our naming of Him by that which we recognize is not subject to criticism so long as the name does not necessitate similarity. *Strength comes only from God.*

Those philosophers who negate the names and attributes [of God] do not profess His inactivity (*ta'tīl*). Whoever attributes an action to God actually means to negate inactivity. No similarity arises from attributing action to God. The same applies to the names. If philosophers avoid

222 Lit. "two essences (*al-dhātayn*)".



admitting that God has names and attributes, what will they answer when asked: "What do you worship? What do you pray to? What religion do you believe in? Who commands you and forbids you regarding what you are commanded and forbidden? Who has created the higher and lower worlds? With whom is the beginning of things?" Either they return to a sensible position, or they join those who deny the temporal generation of the world, nullifying their own words about the First: "It is the Intellect, the Source, the Prior, the First Soul", or whatever they say in that regard. This attitude means choosing to cling to confusion and ignorance, and to reject that which allows one to know [the creator] extraneous to the world. *Strength comes only from God.*

### 2.3. Enquiry [Indication from the Visible to the Unseen]

Abū Manşūr (may God have mercy on him) said:

1) Some say that the visible world (*al-shāhid*) indicates the existence of its equal and similar because the visible is the source of that which is unseen (*al-ghāib*). The target does not differ from the source. The way to know the unseen is through the visible and a thing is known in comparison to its similar. On the basis of this argumentation, they claim that the world is eternal as the visible indicates the existence of its equal. Thus, the unseen is also established as a world thanks to the visible. Then, it refers [in turn] at every time to another of its like before itself. So, by that eternity is necessitated for the universe.

2) Some of them say: Before every time that we think of as the beginning of the world, we can think of another time. Thus, no beginning can be determined for the world.

3) Others say: The visible signifies both similarity and difference. Yet, it signifies difference more obviously.<sup>223</sup>

i) For if one sees something from the world, it indicates the world's temporality or eternity. Its eternity and temporality are not its equal or its similar. Again, what is visible indicates that the world has a creator, or it has

223 The way in which al-Māturīdī goes on to elaborate this position, as well as his application of it in his theological method, suggests that it is his own.

come into existence by itself. These two are different from the world. Then, what is visible indicates the wisdom or folly of its agent, and whether it acts by choice or by nature. All this is other than what he sees.

ii) What he sees does not indicate that the world has a similar. Because if it did indicate that, then he would imagine upon seeing himself that the world is like him, which is impossible.<sup>224</sup> Hence, it is established that seeing a bodily substance does not prove that it has a similar in the unseen world, but it proves one of the aspects that we have mentioned. Yet if you know the howness<sup>225</sup> of what you have seen, when you are informed that this howness also exists in something unseen, you will know that it is similar to what you have seen. However, this does not mean that the visible world proves the existence of the similar; rather, the visible indicates its similar in this respect. In other words, by knowing body and fire, one knows all particular bodies and fires, even if he has not seen them one by one.<sup>226</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

iii) Those who argue [for the eternity of the world with the method of the visible's indication to the unseen] have reversed the relation between the source and its derivative. For, when the present world [i.e., the visible which is used as evidence, did not exist, there was the eternal and eternal [i.e., the unseen]. Therefore, [the eternal] cannot be made a derivative to [the temporal], rather it is its source.<sup>227</sup>

224 This is a *reductio ad absurdum*. Al-Māturīdī wants to show that it is impossible that the visible world indicates the unseen world as its similar. He therefore provides a collorary based on the same principle, which leads to a putatively absurd conclusion: the human being starts out only seeing oneself. Based on the unseen being similar to the visible world, the world as a whole should be similar to the human being, which he suggests is absurd. But this conclusion is in tension with the microcosm-macrocosm argument in his own Introduction.

225 The howness (*kayfiyya*) of something refers to how it is, the way that in a certain aspect it is similar to something else in the created world. In al-Māturīdī's usage, whereas whatness refers to the description that picks out a particular kind of thing in general, howness compares a specific attribute between things. It is also negated from God.

226 Al-Māturīdī appears to be arguing that familiarity with a given howness of something experienced, for instance the burning property of a fire, and the knowledge that this property is present in fire, means that one is able to grasp the nature of any other fire that one happens to encounter. But this knowledge does not establish the existence of any specific fire in the world. Likewise, the knowledge of the world does not establish the existence of the pre-eternal world.

227 Al-Māturīdī suggests that one cannot infer the unseen eternal reality that has onto-



iv) The thing that comes into existence through another is, from a rational perspective, different from and other than it in terms of substance in the visible. Indeed, the acts of building and writing, as well as all kinds of acts and words that are other than their agents, cannot be united with their agents in terms of substance and attribute. The same holds true of the creator of the world.<sup>228</sup>

v) We can say that there are things in the visible world that cannot be perceived and encompassed by the senses, such as hearing, sight, spirit, intellect, desire and so on. Additionally, there are things that can be perceived, such as dense bodies. Now, if we say that these [kinds of beings] are the eternal source, each kind must be generated and originated from its own substance: intellect emerging from intellect, and likewise for sight and hearing. [But in the visible world], it is known that there is a difference between every substance and the thing that arises from it [because, for instance, the incorporeal hearing, sight, etc. emerge from the body, which is corporeal]. Thus, if the substance and the one emerging from it are different, there is the coming into existence out of nothing. When this difference is accepted, the idea that what is ascribed pre-eternality is the world, or has its quality, becomes invalid. In conclusion, this means accepting that the world comes into existence because of one who is not similar to it.

vi) Writing refers to the writer, but it does not indicate the nature of the writer or the existence of its equal because the writer may be an angel, a human or a jinni.<sup>229</sup> Therefore, writing is not indicative of the whatness and howness of the scribe, nor its [own] likeness. On the contrary, writing only refers to a writer. The universe, together with the beings in it, is just like writing: it signifies a creator, but it does not signify His howness and whatness. The same applies to building, weaving, carpentry and other

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logical priority to the visible world by an inference of similarity. This is because, the world is itself entirely derivative of that eternal reality. Hence, its source cannot just be more of the same as itself.

228 In other words, just as a building, which comes into existence through the work of human builders, is other than them and separate from their entity and attributes, the world, which comes into existence through God, is other than Him, and separate from His entity and attributes.

229 Writing indicates the possession of intelligence, but not which of these three kinds of rational beings is the writer.

crafts. Therefore, while demonstrating the creator of the world, it is necessary to look at the wonders that the world contains and the things that can only exist thanks to a wise and knowledgeable agent; yet it is not necessary to know the howness and whatness of the creator of the world through the world. *Strength comes from God alone.*

vii) Shaykh Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The basic principle is that the indication of the world is as various as its different aspects. Thus:

a) The fact that it is changeable and extinguishable, and its contraries may unite in a single substance indicates that it is temporal.

b) The fact that it does not know its principles, nor does it repair its corrupted parts indicates that it did not come into existence by itself.

c) The combination of contrary states and the perfect harmony of the bodily substances of creatures indicate that the ruler and creator of the universe is one.

d) Again, the harmony and regularity of the world as well as the preservation of contraries in one bodily substance indicates the power, wisdom and knowledge of its ruler.

In that case, the aspects of indication vary according to the context in which sensation takes place. For example, the proof for the existence of the creator is the incapacity of the temporal; the proof for the creator's knowledge of the harmony of the world is its unawareness of itself. As a result, the aspects of the indication from the world are not similarity, but difference.

viii) Another principle is as follows: the necessities and needs inherent to the world are elements that indicate the existence of another. However, it is impossible for that other to have its own necessities, because this creates a need for yet another and this continues *ad infinitum*, which is corrupt. *God knows best.*

#### [2.4. The Arguments of Those Who Claim that the World is Eternal]

Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: We can list the arguments of those who claim that the world is eternal as follows:



## [2.4.1. Atheistic Eternalism]

A thing comes into existence from another without an extraneous creator, and this goes on forever. This is based on [the Eternalist] witnessing [the generation of beings]. The visible world is evidence for the unseen. Thus, the visible world is also necessary for the unseen [in terms of one thing being generated from another in eternity]. For if it were possible to affirm the opposite of sensation on the basis of sensation [i.e., something other than eternal generation, such as creation *ex nihilo*], it would be possible to affirm the opposite of what is rationally apprehended of human beings and bodily objects [as reason is also a means of knowledge]. However, to affirm the opposite of what is rationally apprehended means to abandon conceiving in the imagination and reckoning in the intellect, which is the evidence for the non-existence of that thing [i.e., the world].<sup>230</sup> The same applies to belief in a thing that comes into existence out of nothing. An example here is moments of time, which occur in succession. One argues for [the world's eternity] on the basis that no time can be imagined except that it is possible to imagine one before it without end.<sup>231</sup> Again, one argues from the possibility of the realization of everlastingness through things that are not everlasting.<sup>232</sup>

## [2.4.2. Theistic Eternalism or the Theory of Emanation]

Others say: A thing comes into existence from another thing without end due to a wise creator. [Al-Māturīdī comments:] They have reduced the creator to an "efficient cause" for the existence of the world.<sup>233</sup> It is impossible for an efficient cause to exist without its effect. In addition, either [the

230 If it is acceptable to use sensation to affirm its opposite in terms of the world not existing in eternity, then the same must be true for the rational means used to deny the world's existence in eternity. So, the Dahri can nullify the opponent's argument about sensation by constructing a parallel one about rational inference.

231 In the first scenario, one thing is generated from another from eternity. The second scenario extends this for things, such as moments of time, which come into existence from nothing. They still can be imagined continuing in succession from eternity.

232 This is a return of the argument dealt with in 1.3.1.

233 That is, its '*illa*' in the sense of the agent that originates its motion, which reflects the conceptual framework of the *falāsifa*. See Adamson and Pormann, *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, 10, 303. Note, however, that al-Kindī, did not hold to the eternity of the world.

creator] is not ascribed power and generosity in eternity, which is a sign of incapacity and neediness or He is ascribed them, so the object of power exists necessarily and generosity overflows everything. Some other fantastical views on this subject have also been narrated by them.

### [2.4.3. Theory of Eternal Matter]

Some of them say that primordial matter<sup>234</sup> is eternal. It is the source (aṣl), and generation from it is temporal.

Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: These people's doctrine of the eternity of matter relies, as we have mentioned, on the idea that it is impossible for a thing to be generated from nothing.

1) For them, everything temporal is generated from another temporal thing, the first one transforming and disappearing. For example, that which is generated from seminal fluid and that which is generated from an egg.

2) Some say that the temporal generation of the world is due to the accidents that indwell in primordial matter, so that matter turns into moderate and diverse natures.

3) Others say that the temporal generation of the world is [again from matter, but] due to the Creator.

4) Some adopt the doctrine of the "source" but call it "prime matter".

## [2.5. Critique of the Theories Claiming That the World Is Eternal]

### [2.5.1. Critique of Atheistic Eternalism]

1) Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The point upon which all these views are based is the idea that whatever [i.e., creation *ex nihilo*] cannot be conceived in the imagination and cannot be visualized in the mind should be rejected. That [i.e., generation of one thing from another] is the manner in which they have observed the world, so their hearts cannot accept anything different from it. Hence, they should be asked: "Is

234 The word used is *fiṣṣa*. It has been translated as primordial matter to distinguish from al-Māturīdī's term *hayūlā* (prime matter), though as indicated here in 2.4.3 (4) and 2.14 (6) the two are effectively synonymous.



the rejection of things that cannot be visualized in the mind conceivable in your imagination?" If [the Dahri] says "Yes", he obstinately denies the truth, for we have the same power of conception as him, yet we cannot conceive in our imagination the rejection of what is not visualized in the mind.<sup>235</sup> If he answers our question, "No, rather [we are imagining] the supposition of [the rejection]," it is said to him: "How can one conceive in the imagination the eternity or everlastingness of a thing once it has become separated and invisible?"<sup>236</sup> He, however, may still hold to all this. In addition, human beings have powers such as hearing and sight that are not visualized in the mind. Likewise, the powers of a single bodily substance are from food, and by it the power of different substances, such as hearing, sight, understanding, hands, feet and so on, are generated. These are also included in that category of things [that cannot be visualized in the mind], so they are denied by the same proofs [which is absurd].

2) Generation of one thing from another can only be understood as the first being hidden in the second and later on manifested, which is impossible. Indeed, it is impossible for the human to exist as a whole, and for the tree to exist as a whole, that is, together with its fruits, in an initial state; or for the whole of humanity, with their bodily substances to actually exist in the initial state of fluid in the loins. This would mean that innumerable multiples would fit in a single thing. It is not possible for a sound mind to visualize that, and no sane person may accept it.<sup>237</sup> This explanation also

235 This point can be illustrated through three concentric rings. The inner ring represents the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, which is something that cannot be visualized in the mind. That is, we have no way to form a mental image of the world appearing from nothing. The middle ring is the rejection of that doctrine, which the Dahri upholds due to it not being possible to visualize. The outer ring is the conception in the imagination of such a rejection. Al-Māturīdī's contention is that if something cannot be visualized in the mind, then neither can its rejection (in terms of the content of what it is rejecting). But on the Dahri's own principle, that means his rejection should be dismissed.

236 If the Dahri agrees that he cannot conceive such a rejection but seeks to get around this by rejecting what is conceived as a kind of non-visualized idea, then his basic principle is applied to his own doctrine of eternity, which can be seen as equally impossible to visualize as creation *ex nihilo*. Again, on the Dahri's own principle, this doctrine should be rejected.

237 This argument can be linked to one of the metaphysical objections voiced by al-Māturīdī's student al-Rustughfānī to interpreting Q. 7:172 as a primordial covenant. This is commonly envisaged as a pre-life event in which all of Adam's descendants



refutes his view that one thing is generated from another. For the person as a whole was not [hidden] in the seminal fluid. It is also not possible to claim that he was [hidden] in food, because [an organism] grows for a while before it no longer increases in size. However, all those foods, and even more than them, remain available. In fact, whereas some foods make one fat, another person can eat the same food all his life without effect. One sees various animals eat the fruit and leaf of the mulberry, but different things [i.e., droppings] come out of each one. The same goes for dates<sup>238</sup> and other things. This reveals that it is not by the [sole] action of foods. Also, since foods are inanimate, it is impossible for it to be this way [i.e., eating them providing nutrition] without the involvement of a knowledgeable governor. That cause [i.e., the nutritive property of food] cannot derive from other than it without governance, which requires adopting our view.

3) If anything from the world, or part of it, was originated from nothing – as has been mentioned, not [merely hidden inside] something [and then manifested] – it follows that the whole world must have originated from nothing due to what is required in part of it.

4) It is also said to them: Since anything that is visible is finite, and you have taken [the visible part of the world] as a proof for it in general. Then, why should not the entire universe be finite?<sup>239</sup> On the other hand, if a part of the world can be finite and the whole of it can be infinite, why should it not be possible that one part of the world has come from another, while the whole world has not come from anything?<sup>240</sup> Similarly, we see that one part of the world is the place for another part, but the whole world has no place,

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were taken from his loins and made to bear witness to God as their Lord. The concern of al-Rustughfānī is that such a view, which proposes the manifestation of such a chain of descendants across time, strengthens the Dahrīs in their beliefs about the transformation of bodies. See al-Rustughfānī, "Bāb al-mutafarriqāt min fawā'id al-shaykh al-imām alajall Abī l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Sa'īd al-Rustughfānī raḥimahu llāh," 295r-295v; Harvey, "The Case of the Missing Disciple," 112, n. 83.

238 Following Kholeif, 31, by emending MS. 15v to *tamr*.

239 This links to arguments made in 2.3 concerning the indication from the visible world to the unseen. Al-Māturidī suggests that if one is to reason by positive analogy, rather than contrastive inference, then as one reasons from what is finite in one's own experience, the total world arrived at should be finite too.

240 Contingent parts with the whole created *ex nihilo* are less baffling than an infinite based on contingent parts.



due to the disappearance of the relation [between it and anything else].<sup>241</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.* This [all] requires temporality. As for the matter of [the possibility of] everlastingness [despite the impossibility of eternity,] we have already explained it.<sup>242</sup>

5) The case of the imagination, as mentioned above, is as follows: Any time that can be thought, another time can be thought after it. Thus, that time must be temporal. On the other hand, if no beginning is specified for time, all of it is invalidated.<sup>243</sup>

6) If it were possible to empty all possible temporal things from the world or from the origin of the world, it would be possible to reverse every intelligible thing. For example, something could be alive and dead at the same time. Since the world is not devoid of temporal things, it is established that the totality is temporally generated.<sup>244</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

7) Shaykh Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: We have already explained [the objection that the notion of origination from nothing] is unintelligible because it cannot be conceived in imagination.<sup>245</sup>

Also, this mind [which objects that it cannot imagine the generation of the world from nothing] is the mind of someone irrational because he seeks to know through the senses what cannot be known through the senses. Therefore, his attitude is like that of one who seeks to distinguish between sounds with his sight, between colors with his hearing, and who, likewise, seeks to perceive every sensory object with a sense other than its relevant one, and cannot perceive it. The same holds true of the thing which cannot be perceived through the senses. Such a person seeks to reach it with his senses and his mind cannot encompass it. This answer is also a response to his statement: "The generation of a thing from nothing is unintelligible."

241 In other words, the location of any part of the world receives its meaning relative to other parts. But if the whole world is taken into consideration, there is nothing left to provide the reference for its location.

242 See 1.3.1.

243 This is a variation of the arguments in 1.3.1, using the imagination.

244 See Shihadeh, "Mereology in *Kalām*," 9-11.

245 See 2.5.1 (1).

8) Another answer may be given to both matters [that is, the objection to creation *ex nihilo* based on the inability to rationally conceive or mentally visualize it], which is to say: If you mean by the imagination's conception of a thing the proofs of its existence, this is necessary, and we do not argue anything without a proof. But if by this you mean a mental image, our Lord is exalted above this; on the contrary, He [only] produces and creates images for everything that has an image.<sup>246</sup>

9) The proof for the temporality of the world is the impossibility of the existence of life in the dead, because by it they live.<sup>247</sup> Thus, it is established that the life of things is originated. Hence, the same is true for their death, as it sometimes occurs after life [and sometimes it exists without being preceded by life, as is the case for inanimate objects.]<sup>248</sup>

### [2.5.2. Critique of Theistic Eternalism or The Theory of Emanation]

1) The Shaykh Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: As for his [i.e., the Dahri's] statement, "The Creator is the efficient cause of the world",<sup>249</sup> if he means by it the generation of things by nature, it is impossible. For to act by nature is a compelled manner of acting. It is impossible for one with this quality to have created the world because the world is a diversified originated thing whereas one who causes a thing by nature has [action of only one] kind.<sup>250</sup> If he means by [his statement, "The Creator is the efficient cause of the world"], that he originates it from nothing, then that is correct. Given that the meaning of [originating a thing from nothing]

246 It is necessary to rationally conceive of the proof for creation *ex nihilo*, though it cannot be imagined nor visualized. God does not create mental images (*muthulan*) for what is impossible to visualize, such as the world coming into existence from nothing.

247 It is not that dead things cannot be brought to life, but that if they have an accident of life then, by definition, they are alive and not dead.

248 The point being made is that life is inherently a temporal accidental property, such that anything that has it is temporal. But that means that its opposite, death, which follows it in at least some cases, is temporal too. Yet, presuming that anything not alive is dead in al-Māturīdī's sense of the term, then the entire world is temporal.

249 Responding further to the position in 2.4.2.

250 As al-Māturīdī clarifies below, and in 2.9 (4), God acts by choice to originate a world of temporal variety. This is the opposite of acting by nature, which only has a single effect.



requires it coming into existence only after its non-existence, it is wrong to term the Creator "the efficient cause" for the following reasons:

i) First, this is a contradiction, since the non-existent is brought into existence and it needs an agent to bring it into existence. And this requires [the world] to be temporal.<sup>251</sup>

ii) Second, the entirety of the world is due to Him, and it is known that the existence of the temporal is after its non-existence.<sup>252</sup> *God knows best.*

iii) Third, in [the case of the creator as an efficient cause], there would be the existence of aggregation along with separation, motion with stillness, and life with death, which is contradiction and nullification. Rather, it is established that they occur successively: the first, then the second, and so on.<sup>253</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: We adopt the view that God, the Mighty and Majestic, is eternally knowing, powerful, active, and generous in aspects that are validated by the intellect, and upon which He establishes governance [of the world]. He is so in eternity, and accordingly, by His action, everything comes into existence at the time it shall exist. [And this happens] in such a way that [the things to be created] are not independent of being existentiated, are not prevented from falling under [God's] power and are not independent of the Creator through existence in themselves. *Strength comes from God alone.*

This fact is also known in the visible world in the context of knowing and willing things that do not exist yet but will exist in the future. In our opinion, the same holds true for power, will, generosity, and so on.<sup>254</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

251 The Creator cannot be an efficient cause, as such a cause would immediately have its effect, leading to a world created in eternity, which is in contradiction with the temporal world.

252 This seems to be equivalent to the first argument, as follows: the entirety of the world is created by God and comes to exist after it did not. This conflicts with God acting as an efficient cause to create it in eternity.

253 An efficient cause would have its effects immediately. If it was to create these contradictory qualities, then they would simultaneously characterize the same things, which is impossible. Hence, God originates them successively.

254 Human beings are able to know and intend things that do not yet exist. This provides an analogy for God's eternal actions, which are existentiated in their times.

2) As for the aforementioned imagination [that before every time to be thought of as the beginning of the world, another time can be thought of, so no beginning can be determined for the world and thus it is eternal], it may be imagined that the beginning of the seniority of every old person is in [the world's] pre-eternity, the birth of every child is in its eternity, and everyone who arrives at a place is in its eternity, yet the ascription of the quality is not necessary in eternity.<sup>255</sup> This also applies to movement, stillness, separation, and joining. If you say, "This is impossible," the existence of temporal things in eternity is also impossible. *It is God who leads to success.*

### [2.5.3. Critique of the Dualist Eternalist Cosmology]

Those who believe in the two principles of darkness and light also hold that the world is eternal. In fact, those believing this should never adopt the view of the eternity of the world.

1) For, according to their belief, light and darkness were previously separate, but later mixed such that the world was generated from their mixture. It is known that mixing occurs temporally, as separation preceded it [at the time] that the two of them were not called the world.

But these people may say: "Light and darkness are two differing substances. In fact, originally each was in its own domain, the domain of light was all light and good, and the domain of darkness was all dark and evil." With this explanation, the doctrine that the mixed world is eternal is refuted. In particular, the view of Mani<sup>256</sup> is refuted, for he claimed that when light saw that darkness entered and merged with it, it created this world so that its parts could be saved from darkness. So, according to this view, the world came into existence after mixing. Thus, the world [in his view] is eternal after coming into existence. This is an ignorant disregard of the truth.

255 This is a *reductio ad absurdum* that, on the presumption of imagining an eternal world, it would simultaneously be possible for a particular contingent property, such as birth, old age, or motion to be in eternity and yet for that quality to not eternally qualify its bearer, as it would soon change. This is a contradiction, which leads to a rejection of the initial premise.

256 Mani (d. ca 274 CE) was the Persian founder of Manichaeism, a form of dualism that saw light and darkness as eternally opposed aspects of reality. His vision for revealed religion was syncretic, absorbing ideas from various other traditions, such as Christianity. See Sundermann, "Manicheism i. General Survey."



2) Zoroastrians describe light as powerless when it is sovereign with all its helpers and supporters of goodness and beauty, because even a single part of light could not prevent darkness from entering it. Again, they describe light as incapable of knowing when darkness will enter it, in order that light could get rid of darkness. In addition, they claim that light brought this world into existence to save its parts after being caught in the bonds of darkness.

How far away they are from [the eternity of the world], and how ignorant [light] is, which they regard as superior and to which they attribute every good deed! The beginning of all goodness is knowledge, whereas light does not know what is mentioned [i.e., the time when darkness encroaches into it]. The greatness of every good consists in power, whereas light could not protect itself [from darkness] even when it was at its strongest. Again, if light is the creator of the world, how is it that most of the world is evil? So, light has permitted evil to save itself from its yoke. It is as if light helped evil and darkness when it acted thus. Moreover, the parts of darkness increased within the parts of light with the generation of the world, [hence the parts of evil] increased in the parts of the world. So, light was trapped and ruined to an even greater extent. *Strength comes from God alone.*

3) Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The Dualists disagreed on the mixing [of light and darkness]. In fact, some of them attributed the mixing to darkness. However, they also differed. Some of them identified it as an action, while others rejected this, saying that darkness spreads by nature, and is thick and concealing, whereas light is subtle and perceptive, so it falls victim to [darkness]. Thus, mixing with it occurs. Others have attributed [the mixing] to light.

But all of it is nonsense. How do they know that? Rather, the principle in this matter is that darkness and light are subject to change and transformation, division and partition, beauty and ugliness, purity and filth and everything else. If darkness and light return to the parts of the world, they are temporal due to the temporality of the world and disappear with its annihilation.<sup>257</sup>

257 That is, whatever is being described as darkness and light is ultimately from the parts of the world and subject to the same contingencies.

4) Neither light nor darkness possesses divinity because powerlessness and ignorance arise in both. The world, on the other hand, is the evidence for a powerful, omniscient and wise agent. Light and darkness take place within that totality.

5) Neither light nor darkness has created an action that indicates itself. Thus, it has been established that they are not active agents, but passive effects. One of the proofs for the fact that light and darkness are the act of an agent is that there is nothing in the world that is good in its substance in such a way that nothing bad can come out of it, or bad in its substance in such a way that nothing good can come out of it. Therefore, it has been established that it is impossible to deny the procession of such a thing from one.

6) The basic principle is that the mixing is either evil or good.

i) If the mixing is good, [since] it is not free from darkness, then out of darkness comes goodness. Thus, their dualism that no good comes from evil and no evil comes from good is refuted.

ii) If the mixing is evil, the good has joined the evil when it accepted and has become evil. If this mixing is caused by light, it also has two aspects established in it [of good and evil].

7) Additionally, if light and darkness were unmixed at first, but later were mixed, their mixing happens either by themselves [or by something else]. In the first case, each of the two is separated by its own substance and mixed by its own substance, which is contradictory. Were this to be possible, light and darkness could by themselves be in motion and still, alive and dead, sitting and standing. Moreover, it would not be right for the separation to occur by itself, and then the mixing to occur by the cause of the separation. Can you not see that the changes in bodily substances only happen due to something else? The same is true of separation and mixing. Thus, it becomes clear that light and darkness mix by a cause other than themselves and separate by a cause other than themselves. This shows that light and darkness are temporal.

8) They argue that slaughtering animals is prohibited. However, they should consider slaughtering animals lawful, because by it, the dark body is separated from the bright soul, and revealing light is separated from concealing darkness. For this reason, they described light as subtle and perceptive,



characterizing the soul with light, and not with darkness. Therefore, slaughtering animals must be lawful. *Strength comes from God alone.*

9) The principle [in this matter] is that they deny evil comes from the substance of good and good comes from the substance of evil, which leads them to the doctrine of dualism. Then, they accepted the reality of confessing to killing, since it is a sin in their sight. If the killing was committed by someone other than the one who claimed responsibility for it, he would have lied, which is evil. If it was really committed by him, he would have spoken the truth by confessing the sin. Thus, it becomes clear that inability to fathom the wisdom in the creation of evil does not require adopting dualism because evil is also realized in it.<sup>258</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

10) Dualists of all people should not talk of wisdom and the pursuit of knowledge, because this is their view: "There is absolutely no evil that comes out of the substance of light." Yet ignorance is evil. If someone is from that substance, then he would be knowledgeable and wise by his nature, and it would be impossible for him to be ignorant and foolish. However, learning knowledge and pursuing wisdom is the right of whoever is ignorant of them. If someone is from the substance of evil, then he will not benefit from [learning], because by his nature he will neither accept nor have the capacity for good. If this is the case, the Dualist's claims and disputation for wisdom and knowledge are refuted because, if their disputation on this matter was with [someone from] the substance of light, they would be already knowledgeable before the disputation, and therefore it would have no meaning. If their disputation was with [someone from] the substance of darkness, they would reject knowledge and wisdom, and would not listen, so it would be pointless. Therefore, in order to validate the meaning [of ignorance and knowledge], it must be accepted that they both exist in one of the two substances [of light and darkness]. This indicates that good and evil are gathered either in light or in darkness. Yet that meaning [of the distinction between ignorance and knowledge] is what compelled them to dualism [in the first place]. So, dualism has been refuted, thanks to God.

258 The basis of the argument here is that existence of evil that stems from good or good from evil is found in the world whether or not one adopts dualism. Thus, a dualist in the above scenario must accept that a good person (who did not kill) can do evil by lying about it, whereas an evil person (who did kill) can do good by telling the truth in their confession.

The principle in this matter is this: their talk of [gaining] wisdom either takes place with their substance, which is already knowledgeable, and therefore this conversation becomes pointless, or the speaker<sup>259</sup> is ignorant [and so cannot gain it].<sup>260</sup> Whichever possibility is true, the two things [knowledge and ignorance] are both from a single person or from other than his substance [i.e., another person].<sup>261</sup> From that other person, in turn, there is either [the state of being unable] to accept [knowledge, if he fails to know by nature] or [the act of] engaging in pointlessness [if he knows by nature]. No matter which one of these two is accepted, what we mention [that is, the combination of good and evil in one thing] will occur in it. *Strength comes from God alone.*

11) Moreover, it is said to them: If in their view it is impossible for both good and evil to emerge from one thing, how are [light and darkness] responsible for a world in which everyone is characterized by them? Thus, this act [of light and darkness] refutes the claim of those who say that [good and evil do not unite]. Have you seen any foolishness greater or ignorance clearer than that which [light and darkness] have done to themselves?<sup>262</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

12) One of them might say: How can you say that a foolish act may occur from a wise person?

We answer this as follows: Foolishness does not come from someone who is wise in himself. Rather, it only comes from the ignorant. This is just as you would say that the ignorance coming from light is from the action of darkness and so on. As for God, He is praised and exalted above this. It is possible that He acts with a wisdom that the human intellect cannot fathom. Truly, He is sublime beyond it.<sup>263</sup> Wisdom, on the other hand, is hitting

259 Reading *al-mutakallim* with MS. 18r and K, 37, rather than TA, 101, who thought the meaning was only preserved with its omission.

260 This seems like a version of Meno's Paradox. The person who is knowledgeable does not need to learn, while the person who is ignorant cannot. See Sorensen, "Epistemic Paradoxes".

261 Reading *jawharihi* with MS. 18r and K, 37.

262 The contradiction here is between the claim that both good and evil cannot come from the same thing, and the fact that everything in the world has this dual nature. In other words, the evidence of the world leads to the analogy that the creator is one entity with the capacity to produce both.

263 Reading MS. 18v as *wa-alā*, rather than *wa-illā*, as found in K, 37, and TA, 102. The



the mark: placing everything in its proper place; giving everyone his due allotment and doing no injustice to any of them. Only those who have doubts about God or about what monotheists attribute to Him deny this because they are ignorant of the limits of wisdom and the scope of allotments, and they grant rights to those who are not their owners. We shall mention it, God willing, in a more suitable place than this.<sup>264</sup>

## 2.6. Enquiry: [God Is Not Called a Body]

Shaykh Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The term "body" is used in two senses:

1) In the visible world, the whatness of the body is the name for a thing with sides, ends, or that is three-dimensional. Therefore, it is not permissible to refer to God, Exalted is He, as a "body" by [attributing these meanings to Him], because [having direction, end, and dimensions] is a sign of creation and temporal generation. For this carries the meaning of parts and limits, which are the signs of temporal generation. However, we have explained that there is none like Him, whereas this renders Him similar to most other things.

2) If the term ["body"] is used about God without attributing [the meanings] we have mentioned to Him, the term will forsake its known meaning. Hence, it cannot be known [whether or not God may be called "body"] through reason and inference, and it is the right of the tradition on God's authority [to determine] if<sup>265</sup> "body" is one of His names. However, such knowledge has come neither from Him, nor from anyone whom He has allowed to be followed [i.e., the prophets]. Therefore, He cannot be called a "body".<sup>266</sup> If He could be called "body" from mere inclination without any sensory, narrational or rational evidence, He could be named "corpse" and "person", and by any name of which the tradition disapproves, not to mention any name by which creatures are named. This is corrupt.

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difference in meaning is profound. In the former case, the phrase acts as an intensifier for the assertion that God's wise acts go beyond the human intellect, whereas the latter case would suggest that there are situations where God transcends the notion of wisdom entirely, which would be absurd within al-Māturīdī's system.

264 See e.g., 3.1, 4.2, 6.1.

265 Reading *in* with MS. 18v.

266 Lit. "[what can be] professed in it is not expansive."

3) If by "body" the affirmation [of God's existence] was understood without any whatness, it could be employed for God, so long as nothing else was intended. However, no one has used the term "body" in the sense of mere existence because though accidents and qualities are affirmed to exist, they are not called "bodies".<sup>267</sup> Therefore, this usage is wrong.

4) If an objection is made to us by saying that the names "agent" and "knowing", and so on, are used about God, two answers can be given:

i) Even if we did not know the meaning of these two names, it would be permissible to name God with them because this meaning is established in tradition, yet the meaning of the [name "body"] is not established. Therefore, the two are different.

ii) The meanings of "agent" and "knowing" are known in the visible world and are not indicants of temporal generation; also, in terms of linguistic conventions, their meanings are not such indicants. So, it is possible for God to be characterized with them. Hence, they can be used for God, provided that the possibility of resemblance to creatures is excluded. *God alone leads to success.*

5) An objection may be made as follows: Why do you not accept the view that God can be called "body" because He is named "agent"? The same holds true for "powerful" and "knowing". In fact, everything that has [power and knowledge] in the visible world is a body.

The answer to this objection is as follows: The names ["knowing" and "powerful"] are not given in the visible world due to something being a body. Indeed, we know of objects that are not named as such. Therefore, no objection can be made in this respect. Through tradition and rational thought, we have previously set forth the conditions for naming God, but we do not see these conditions in the names brought to us as objections. If naming with "body" were permissible, someone else would confront us with names like "corpse" and "person".

6) In addition, the name "body" is not used in the visible world for indivisible things, such as accident, action, motion and stillness.<sup>268</sup> Therefore,

<sup>267</sup> Al-Māturīdī distinguishes between bodies and "relational accidents", which are momentary. See 6 (6) and Chapter 3:6.

<sup>268</sup> If al-Māturīdī upheld any concept of the indivisible atom (*jawhar* or *juz' alladhī lā yatajazza'a*) as the underlying substrate of bodies, it would not make sense to fail



it has been established that "body" is a name for things that have parts such as "long", "wide" and "compound". Even if it was not false to say "compound" about God, its apparent meaning does not indicate that He acts in accordance with it. This is because, if [His action] is nullified, so is His existence in His essence in eternity. If this is the case, such names as long, corpse, color, taste, etc., could also be said about Him because nothing is apparent except that. Since this is not possible – as is truly required, even if there is not in the expression its indicant – the same is true for "body".<sup>269</sup> *It is God who leads to success.*

### [2.7. It is Permissible to Call God "Thing"]

If it is said: You say about God, "A thing that is not like things", but why not say, "A body that is not like bodies"?<sup>270</sup>

1) It is said to him: Since the reason justifying us to refer to God as "thing" does not exist in "body", we do not call [God a "body"].

This person may seek to corner us [by saying that we should use the term "body"] based on our use of the word "thing" about God. But most things – accidents and qualities that we do not need to call "body" – prevent us from that. If he wants to corner us with our expression, "Not like things", it does not work because it is not an expression of affirmation used to designate the whatness of an existent. So, this question has no basis. This question is of the same nature as the following question: "Since it is permissible that He is a thing that is not like things, why should it not be permissible that He is a person that is not like people?"

2) The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: This question is answered as follows: Because God "is not [a person]".<sup>271</sup> This kind [of

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to mention it here given that he is engaged in cataloguing indivisible things. Yet he only mentions different kinds of accidents. For comments on the theory of classical "atomism", in which "body" is the name for a composite of indivisible atoms and accidents. See Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām*, 95-96.

269 *A reductio ad absurdum*: if God can be named a "body", then He can be termed a "compound" entity, His essential properties are not eternal and bodily characteristics may apply to Him. This is absurd, so these all must be nullified from Him.

270 The main targets of this section are the Karrāmīs who upheld a corporeal position on God. See Zysow, "Karrāmiyya," 256-58.

271 There is a gloss in TA, 104, drawn from a marginal note on MS. 19v, which reads as follows: "...a body, it cannot be said, "God is a body that is not like bodies".

statement from the opponent] is not an objection, but a judgment [about who God is]. We do not have the authority to generate [such a description of the] deity, so that we can be countered with its like and asked, "You have made this and why have you not made that?" On the contrary, God is exalted above being made in a certain state. He is described as He is.<sup>272</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

3) Moreover, the [initial] objection, if understood well, is contradictory because he said: "Since you say God is a thing that is not like things, why do you not say God is a body that is not like bodies?" If we say, "body" [instead of thing], our saying, "a thing that is not like things" becomes, "a thing that is not like some things". For things consist of two categories [i.e., bodies and accidents], and bodies are one of the two. This proves the falsity of the statement, "God is a body that is not like bodies". *Strength comes from God alone.*

4) Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Moreover, the meaning of our statement, "a thing that is not like things" is to exclude the whatness of things [in relation to God]. This whatness is of two kinds: substance and quality, that is, body and accident.<sup>273</sup> Thus, the whatness of substances and qualities, that is, bodies and accidents, is excluded. When we remove the meaning of body from substances, we also remove the name of this meaning. Likewise, if we remove the aspect of resemblance (*tashbih*) and nullification (*ta'tīl*) from the affirmation [of God], we refute the statement [that God is a body]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

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This makes the answer a repetition of the point already made. It seems rather that al-Māturīdī is responding to the final question of the previous point about "a person who is not like people". This provides a better transition to the argument in this paragraph.

272 In this paragraph, al-Māturīdī responds to the contention that if one holds that God is "a thing that is not like things" one should also hold, "God is a person that is not like people". This is not even an objection, but a judgment about the description of God, which is invalidly held up to attack his own position. Rather, God is described as He is based on sound tradition and reason (see 2.4 (1) i a-b).

273 The following has been quoted from al-Māturīdī's lost work on *uṣūl al-fiqh* titled *Ma'khadh* (or: *Ma'ākhidh*) *al-sharā'i'*: "According to the people, the attributes of accidents are themselves, and the attributes of bodily substances are others (*aghyār*) [i.e., the accidents] inhering in them". Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adilla*, 1:146. Presumably this is primarily a reference to the "relational accidents" and "vital accidents" that characterize the entire body composite.



5) There are two reasons justifying our view that God can be called a "thing":

i) The concept of "thing" is accepted as a name. Correspondence in names does not require similarity in meaning. Indeed, [such correspondence] is sometimes used in a context that negates correspondence in meaning [i.e., homonymity]. For example, it is said: "So-and-so is one [unequalled] (*wāḥid*) in his age and one [unequalled] in his tribe." In this expression, the word "one" is employed to negate the idea that the person in question has a peer and similar in the intended aspect, even if they [the rest of the people] are also referred to as "one". If correspondence in the name required similarity in meaning, it could not be used in the context in which homonymity is intended. The same is true for the statement of "disbelief" and "Islam", which realizes the name for each of them, and corresponds in terms of being a statement. However, their meanings are contradictory. The same is true for movements, actions and so on.

There are proofs for the view that the name "thing" can be used to refer to God:

a) The first is the evidence of tradition, from His words, "Nothing is like Him."<sup>274</sup> If God were not a "thing", the thingness of things would not be negated from Him by the name "thingness". For the thing is, in reality, the opposite of that which cannot be called a thing. The following verse is another evidence: "Say: Which thing is greatest in testimony? Say: God is Witness [between me and you]."<sup>275</sup> If the name "thing" did not refer to God, this verse could not include and relate to Him.

b) The second is the evidence of reason:

I) Thingness is the customary name for existence and not anything else. For the expression, "It is nothing" means negation and non-existence, unless the sense of humiliation is meant. Thus, it has been established that [the word "thing"] is the name for affirming [existence] and negating [its] nullification. If a certain folk is unaware that the meaning of "thing" is affirmation [of existence] and forsaking [its] nullification, the use of the word "thing" is avoided when talking to them lest their hearts believe in a distasteful

<sup>274</sup> Q. 42:11.

<sup>275</sup> Q. 6:11.

meaning. Instead, the word "isness" (*hastiyya*) is used, as it expresses the affirmation of a thing [in existence] more clearly, although ["thingness" and "isness"] denote the same meaning for those who know this language.

II) On the other hand, the expression, "It is nothing" is used in the sense of negating the truth or belittling that which exists. That is why the word "thing", [which is its opposite], is used to affirm and glorify [the existence of] the essence. Such befits God. However, the expression "not a body" means neither negation nor belittling. Similarly, the word "body" neither affirms existence nor glorifies it. Therefore, [the words "thing" and "body"] are different. Accordingly, the expressions "not knowing" and "not powerful" are also names that negate greatness and majesty, whereas the names "knowing" and "powerful" mandate them. *It is God who leads to success.*

III) In the visible world, the word "thing" is not understood to mean the whatness of the essence, nor do the words "knowing" and "powerful" mean the quality.<sup>276</sup> On the contrary, "thing" means existence and isness, whereas the words "knowing" and "powerful" mean that it is characterized; not that these words express the whatness of the essence. On the other hand, when one says "body", this word expresses its whatness: that is, it has dimensions, directions, and ends, and it is receptive to accidents. The same is true of the human being and other substances.<sup>277</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

IV) It is necessary to hold to all of this in terms of naming [i.e., using the terms "thing", "knowing", and "powerful"], according to what has been established in the tradition. *God alone leads to success.*

Abū Maṣṣūr said: The basic principle in the articulation of monotheism is that its beginning is the affirmation of similarity, and its end is the affirmation of unity. This has been prompted by necessity, as the things perceived and understood by the senses are taken as evidence for the things that the understanding is deficient in perceiving in imagination. For

276 Reading the marginal addition of *al-ṣifa* to MS. 20v as correct, along with K, 42.

277 In other words, to call something "thing" does not imply that it shares any of the contingent properties known by similarity with other created things. It is, therefore, appropriate for God. Likewise, naming God "knowing" and "powerful" does not mean that He possesses accidents of knowledge and power (al-Māturīdī's argument that God is characterized with distinct divine attributes of knowledge and power is to follow in the next section). The word "body", however, does imply the contingent whatness of created entities.



example, the reward and punishment of the Hereafter are known and understood through the pleasures and pains of this world. In the same manner, God Most High is described through the things perceived from His creation as an indication and expression. Hence, one says "knowing" and "powerful" and so on, for refraining from this is nullification [of the attributes]. Yet verifying the existent meaning in His creation is similarity, so [a phrase] such as "... not like knowers" is joined to it in order to negate similarity whilst affirming [the attributes]. This is the case with the names that are required by both the necessity of reason and tradition. It is too bold to use names for God about which there is no tradition and for which there is no possibility in the mind. *Strength comes from God alone.*

ii) Or "thing" is not a name because every name has a feature and when that feature is mentioned, it indicates the whatness of the thing it belongs to. For example, if it is asked, "What is body?", we say, "It is that which has three dimensions". Likewise, if it is asked "What is the human being?", we mention the definition known in the visible world: "alive, speaking, dead", that is, capable of [rationality and mortality]. Similarly, each substance has its own definition that is mentioned by its own name.<sup>278</sup> Thus, one who is "knowing" and "powerful" cannot be characterized by an expression that defines His essence or discloses His whatness; only the removal of ambiguity from Him and the origination of beings from Him are mentioned, but not the whatness of his essence. Therefore, it is permissible to say this about God and no similarity is implied in terms of the whatness of His essence. Fearing that the otherness of knowledge and power may be understood, as they are in the visible world, the expression "not like other [knowing and powerful ones]" is added. Hence, it has been expressed that God is knowing and powerful in His essence, not by depending on any other.<sup>279</sup> *It is God who leads to success.*

278 This passage appears to suggest that al-Māturīdī, like much of early *kalām*, works with a conceptualist model of universals consisting of descriptions drawn from the visible world grouping particulars with common characteristics. See Frank, "The Ash'arite Ontology I," 177-78. On the specific definition and its connection to philosophical currents, see Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes*, 49, n. 13.

279 Again, al-Māturīdī stresses that affirming that God is "knowing" does not carry with it similarity in the whatness of His essence. That is, though the fact that God is "knowing" plays a role in the essential characteristics that together define who He is, it does not mean that one can answer the question, "What is He?" in terms of similarity with



Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Someone was asked about the meaning of "one", and he said that it can be taken in four senses:

a) The "whole" that cannot be multiplied.

b) The "part" that cannot be divided into two.

c) That [i.e., the "some"] which is between them and accepts both aspects due to being above what cannot be divided and below what cannot be multiplied, as there is nothing beyond the whole.<sup>280</sup>

d) The fourth by which these three subsist: He [is God] whose [oneness] is unlike that;<sup>281</sup> subtler than that.<sup>282</sup> He is inexpressible, ineffable, unimaginable, and perplexing. That is God, the Lord of the Worlds.

If one wants to use the term "body" for God by attributing to Him that which we have explained about the meanings of bodies, such as being a site for accidents and being finite, he must talk of the meanings of the creation of visible bodies. If ["body"] was affirmed in every aspect, its application to God would be impossible and corrupt, because it is an ascription to Him by that which establishes the evidence of His temporality. If [the name "body"] does not require attributing [the quality of createdness to God], its due right is to be used in naming Him. If it is established [in the language], it is used, otherwise it is not used. *Strength comes from God alone.*

other created things. If one could, then God's knowledge could be explained as "other than Him, just as knowledge, as an accident, is an accidental property that is other than the essence of a person in the visible world (because a person can alternately possess knowledge and ignorance). Using the phrase, "...not like other..." is the exact opposite of ascribing whatness to God: rather than having a shared similarity, all possible similarity is negated. This means that God possesses knowledge as an essential property.

280 See al-Kindī's discussion of the different ways that "one" can be said in Adamson and Pormann, *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, 29. The idea is that a whole, smallest part or some part each has an aspect of oneness, as they can be identified as a single thing. As al-Kindī goes on to argue, all of these partake of merely accidental oneness, which means they receive it by something that has oneness essentially: the One. See Adamson and Pormann, *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, 28-29. To give an example within the context of al-Māturīdī's metaphysics, the world is a whole that cannot be multiplied; a single accident is a part that cannot be further divided (see 2.6 (6)); and a body is some part of the whole that can both be decomposed down to smallest parts and multiplied up to the whole.

281 For the rendering of *huwa huwa* as "same", see Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 324-25. Also see 13.3 (7).

282 This is because God's oneness is not based on accidental considerations due to the negation of whatness from Him.



## 2.8. Enquiry: [the Attributes of God]

Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Describing and naming God as powerful, knowing, living, gracious, and generous is correct in terms of both traditional and rational evidence.

The traditional evidence is as follows: The Qur'an and other books of God have cited these names, and the divine messengers and all nations have named God with the names I have mentioned. However, a group of people referred these names to someone other than God, thinking that if the name is affirmed, there arises a similarity between God and everyone who is named by it. If there arose a similarity with the mere affirmation of the name, there would also be a similarity with the negation in its nullification. Also, if the name is negated, a similarity arises between Him and that which does not come under any name, that is, what does not [exist]. But we have already explained that it is impossible that similarity occurs due to a correspondence in names. Thus, God is named as He names Himself, and He is described as He describes Himself.

The rational evidence also requires [naming God by these names]. Because:

1) Since there are creatures different from God the Almighty in terms of their substance and attributes, this indicates that His action is not enacted by nature, but by choice.

2) The harmony of actions that take place one after the other without apparent corruption and without departing from the path of wisdom proves that the effect was generated by the agent through choice, thus establishing that the creation really came into existence by His action. *Strength comes from God alone.*

3) Since God creates a thing<sup>283</sup> and afterwards destroys it, including that which He repeats like night and day, it becomes clear that His action is by choice. For He corrects what he corrupts, restores what he destroys,

283 Following K, 44, who removes the word *ghayr* (other). As written in MS. 21v, it would read, "God creates other than a thing", which is problematic. In TA, 108, there is an attempt to solve this problem by reading it as "God creates other than a single thing", adding the word *wāḥid*. Another possibility would be to read the sentence as "God creates from nothing" (*min ghayr shay'*), adding *min*.

brings what does not exist into existence and makes non-existent what is existent. So, it is established that this is by choice, as one who acts by nature cannot destroy what he creates and cannot create what he destroys. *Strength comes from God alone.*

4) Likewise, we have shown that the world has been generated from nothing. This kind of action can only be performed by one whose action is at the furthest limit of the meaning of choice, whereas the truth of one whose action is by nature is compulsion. It is impossible that his action reaches the level of creating things *ex nihilo* and is by nature at the same time.

5) The generation of a thing by nature means being under the control of another and being deprived of the power of acting otherwise. This is a sign of temporality and weakness. Our Lord is exalted above this.

6) People traditionally pray and invoke God to save them from trouble, believing that He defeated such-and-such and made victorious such-and-such, helped so-and-so and abandoned so-and-so, and that every powerful one acts with the power created by Him. One cannot obtain any of this from the one who is compelled, nor does one ask for it. This indicates that the world came into existence by the choice of God.

Since God's choice is established, it is also established that He has power over the creation and the will for it to exist as it is.<sup>284</sup> This is because beings that come from one without power emerge in an irregular and corrupt way; such a one lacks the power to make both the thing itself and its opposite. Therefore, it has been established that what is generated by Him is generated through power and choice. These are the signs of the real act in the visible world, which is the basis for knowing the unseen. *Strength comes from God alone.*

7) What we have mentioned about the continuity of action – I mean the real world that occurs due to [God's] action, and its proper and perfect succession – is proof that His action is enacted with knowledge.<sup>285</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

284 Al-Māturīdī establishes the attributes of power and will from God's creation by choice, rather than by nature.

285 The attribute of knowledge is inferred from the consistency of the created world.



8) When one discovers all of the untried substances that are of benefit to those who try them, and that everything is created with the living beings whom it depends on for survival, the following is known: the world came into existence by one who knows the howness and needs of everything, and that by which it can live and sustain.

9) God, exalted is He, has created creatures in such a way as to indicate that they are temporally generated, they have a creator, and their creator is one. It would be impossible for the creation to appear in the present manner if God did not know it and create in it the evidence of His knowledge and creation of it. *God alone leads to success.*

10) On the same basis is the coming of messengers with the [divine] command that, were [the people] to follow and act upon it, there would be no difference, division, and corruption. If God did not know [the matters on which people conflict], they would have divided.

### [2.9. The Act of Creation is Other Than the Object of Creation]

1) The statement of one who says, "There was God in eternity and there were no creatures, then creatures came into existence without any existentionation other than the creatures themselves" is like the statement of one who mentions the world without mentioning another to whom the world is related. *God alone leads to success.* The [atheistic] doctrine that relates [the generation of existence] to natures and nutrients – since it accepts the existence of a thing from which something other than itself generates – is more correct than the [Mu'tazili] doctrine that attributes the generation of creatures after their non-existence to God but maintains that nothing has occurred from God save the generation of creatures. Therefore, the supporters of the first doctrine accept the [generative] relation between the agent and the effect, while the adherents of the second do not accept that relation. *Strength comes from God alone.*

2) There is no being in the visible world who is powerful and unhindered, but has no action, who can speak, but has no speech. The visible world is evidence for the unseen. Thus, the same rule applies to the unseen. *God alone leads to success.*

## [2.10. The Agent of Actions are Creatures, Not God]

1) Creatures are sometimes characterized by corruption, evil, ugliness, and wickedness. If all these were the acts of God in their essence, God would have been described and named by all of these, and the following would have been said about Him: corruptor, evil, ugly in action and wicked in His deed. Since it is disbelief to describe and name God by them, it has been established that one who is named and characterized by them is not God. *Salvation is only from God*. Such is the case with the acts of giving birth, obedience, disobedience, and acquisition [of a livelihood].<sup>286</sup> If these acts truly belonged to God, He would be named by them. *Strength comes from God alone*.

2) If it is the case that it is initially impossible for an act to originate from God, but later it becomes possible, [then there are two options]: either it is impossible because of Himself, so it must be like that forever; or it becomes possible because of something other than Him, which is the matter under question. Once it is established that the action is not possible due to other than Him, then He is the agent [of the action] Himself.<sup>287</sup> *God alone leads to success*.

3) Some of those who claim that creatures are truly the actions of God [that is, they are the action itself, not the effect] say that the creatures are like the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), which is truly an action [of the human being, as well as the effect produced].

Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: This is an unfounded thought. That [i.e., the prayer] is truly the name for [the person's] act, but that does not indicate acceptance [of the claim] that creatures are truly His acts. The impossibility of this is obvious, because we have already explained [the disbelief of] naming God by [the actions of creatures].

286 The word *kasb* is also used for the metaphysical doctrine of the acquisition of deeds by human agents. See 6.3. Here, the common linguistic meaning is intended.

287 A *reductio ad absurdum* of the opponent's position. The opponent holds that God is not eternally the creator. Thus, initially it must not be possible for the action to arise from Him, then subsequently it becomes possible. So, there are two options about the initial case: 1) either its initial impossibility was from God, in which case it can never become possible (as God cannot change); 2) something else makes it possible, yet how it is that things other than God can come to exist is what is in question. Thus, the initial premise that God is not eternally the creator is false. Therefore, God acts eternally.



## [2.11. Eternity of the Divine Attributes and Temporality of the Acts by Them]

If God is described by existentiation [i.e., as the creator] in eternity, why did the creature not exist [in eternity]? The answer is as follows:

1) God existentiated things as they would exist, which is like saying that God's having power over things and His willing and knowledge of them is meant for everything to exist at its own time.<sup>288</sup> The originated entity exists as what it is, not upon [God's] knowledge of it [i.e., eternally], even though "what it is" exists "thereafter" with respect to [its] limitation as a being without entailing change in [God's] knowledge of it and power over it.<sup>289</sup>

2) The basic principle is that if a description is used unrestrictedly about God and He is characterized by action and knowledge, and so on, it is necessary to describe Him by them in eternity. On the other hand, if things such as "the known", "the accomplishable", "the willed" and "the existentiated" are mentioned together with that attribute, their times are also mentioned lest they are thought to be eternal like the qualities in question. *Strength comes from God alone.*

The proof of the first issue [that is, the eternal nature of divine attributes] has already been described. The proof of the second issue [that is, the

288 So, just as the opponent accepts that things begin to exist by the effective exercise of eternal divine knowledge and power, they should do the same for eternal existentiation.

289 Al-Māturidī establishes a very important point, defended further below, which is that, strictly speaking, statements of before and after do not apply to God and His attributes but only to the limits of the created universe. God is, therefore, eternal in a timeless way and does not undergo any form of durational succession. This view seems to have been taken up by those who immediately followed al-Māturidī in Samarqand. His student Abū al-Ḥasan al-Rustughfanī states: "The act of the servant does not precede the act of God Most High, nor the act of God that of the servant (*lā taqaddama fi 'l al-'abd 'alā fi 'l allāh ta'ālā wa-lā fi 'l allāh 'alā fi 'l al-'abd*). Al-Rustughfanī, "Bāb al-mutafarriqāt min fawā'id al-shaykh al-imām alajall Abī l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Sa'id al-Rustughfanī rahimahu llāh," 285r. Abū Salama al-Samarqandī, who wrote a book titled *Jumal min uṣūl al-dīn*, which summarized *The Book of Monotheism*, remarks (as reconstructed from the commentary ascribed to Ibn Yaḥyā al-Bashāgharī): "God Most High created [places], such that His attribute at the existence of the place is like His attribute before the place, and He is characterized with neither before nor after, as He is their creator (*wa-huwa mawṣūf bi-lā qabl wa-lā ba'd wa-huwa khāliqhumā*). Al-Bashāgharī, "Sharḥ jumal min uṣūl al-dīn," 58r.



temporality of the objects to which the attributes are related] is this: failing to mention the time of the object enacted through the attribute implies the eternity of the object, or ignorance about it in other than its time and likewise incapacity. This is because if it is said, "It is existentially for the Hour", this implies that it was brought into existence in that hour, and likewise the knowledge of it, the power over it and the will [to do it].<sup>290</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

The divine enactment of the Day of Judgment and annihilation [of the world] has another meaning: if one asks its time by saying, "When will God enact the Hour?", he may intend either making the Hour the time for the Day of Judgment or the time when God created it. The first is impossible because it is not the case [as the Hour precedes the Day of Judgment]. The second is corrupt because it determines a time for existentialization, which is a sign of temporality.

3) If it is said: Existentialization without the things generated is an affirmation of incapacity. It is answered: This is only the case when existentialization is meant for a determined time and [the created things] do not come into existence at that time. The same holds true of the will and knowledge of them. If the created thing does not appear at that time, there is ignorance and compulsion. On the other hand, if something is created for the time when it will exist [and does not appear until that time comes], there is not [ignorance and compulsion], as we have explained with regard to knowledge. The same is true of hearing, sight, graciousness and generosity. God is characterized by these qualities in eternity, but the things God hears, sees, and so on, are temporal.<sup>291</sup> This is the way of temporal generation:

290 The argument here concerns the status of the objects, which are given their times in the created order despite the timeless status of the act of existentialization. Two cases are considered on the hypothetical presumption that the times for the objects are not given: 1) The objects are themselves eternal, which is rejected here and further argued against below; 2) the objects are temporal, but God does not know them, have power over them, will them or existentialize them until their times arrive. Al-Māturīdī's rejection of this latter option signals his opposition to a notion of the divine nature in which God exists with a durational extension such that He acts to bring the temporal world into existence from moment to moment.

291 This makes it clear that, for al-Māturīdī, all divine actions, such as existentialization, hearing, seeing, graciousness, generosity, and as will be seen below, speech, are essential attributes that characterize God in eternity.



[God knows, wills and creates things along with their times in eternity, and when their times arise, they appear]. When the two [the divine hearing and the thing heard] are mentioned, the time of the thing heard must also be mentioned. So, it is like the former [case of existentiatio]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

The principle is as follows: one whose action cannot go beyond the time of its occurrence is described with incapacity. On the other hand, one whose action can go beyond that time and is described with power, is like someone who can do both a thing and its opposite, and his action is more complete. Similarly, one who can perform a certain action in a determined place without being able to go beyond it is below the person whose action takes place everywhere. The characterization of God by what I have mentioned [of unrestricted action] is similar, for it is an ascription of completeness.

The act of the servant,<sup>292</sup> however, does not take place outside of its time because the act arises on account of the preoccupation of the servant with it and the instruments [needed]. God, exalted is He, acts by His own self, just as He knows and has power by His essence. Everyone else acts through another without which the act would not take place. God is the creator *ex nihilo*. Therefore, the assessment [they have made] is nullified. Power, will, and other acts are as we have described.

4) Another proof: an indirect (*mutawallid*) act is generated from the creature, [with its effect] occurring after a gap of time. [We can illustrate this with] shooting arrows and murdering. The servant deserves the name "killer", "murderer" and "wounder" once the reality of his act is concluded. So, an analogy with this is sound for God, even though His action is not to be described as occurring by nature and mediation. This is because the lack of either of the two aspects [i.e., nature and mediation] in the visible world does not prevent us from verifying the act.<sup>293</sup> The same holds true of the unseen, even though the action in the unseen does not happen in that way [i.e., by nature and mediation]. This case is similar to what we explained in

292 The term "servant" (*'abd*) usually refers to a conscious being that can be subject to obligations. The paradigmatic example is of course the human being, though the same idea can apply to the jinn. Another translation could be "creature", but this has been reserved for *khalq* and related words.

293 Or reading according to MS. 23v: "verifying with the intellect" (*al-'aql*).

the affirmation of a "thing" that is not a body, due to the permissibility of naming God a "thing", even though He is not an accident. Everything in the visible world other than a body is an accident with respect to existence, not that it is its name.<sup>294</sup> Hence, this is analogous to the first case [of the mediated act].<sup>295</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

Also, if what they say [that is, the existence of existentiation without the generated thing] is a sign of incapacity, then the creature will lack the capacity to realize effects, because he cannot act without using his own body by moving and stopping it.<sup>296</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

5) Everyone accepts that he is subject to a command or prohibition without the coming of any commands or prohibitions in this time. The same holds true of the promise of reward and the threat of punishment. Therefore, it is now that one is subject and liable to the commands and prohibitions sent down to the Messenger of God (peace be upon him). One cannot deny that what exists in the present moment is through existentiation in eternity. Similarly, God, exalted is He, is described by knowing every being that exists, even if He is described [as having known that] before due to His knowledge. *God alone leads to success.*

6) The meaning of existentiation, even though the human mind cannot understand it, can be expressed with the easiest possible word. From the expression: "Be!"<sup>297</sup> everything is known as it will exist, and in accordance with this knowledge, it comes into existence. [This act] brings everything into existence in the exact manner and at the exact time that is prescribed, without repetition. It includes all commands, prohibitions, promises of reward and threats of punishment and it informs of the things that exist and

294 This refers back to al-Māturīdī's preference for the term "quality" (*sifa*). See 2.1.3.1 (7).

295 Al-Māturīdī here argues that God can be named the creator in eternity of things that will only be generated in time on analogy with human beings who perform actions that have their effects at a later time. This holds even though God does not act with mediation or according to nature, as it has been established in the earlier discussion that analogy is established without the essence being the same in the two cases, which would make God similar to His creation.

296 Applying this principle to the human being, every effect would have to be instantly realized, yet it is clear that the human being realizes effects in the world in a mediated way via the motions in their bodies.

297 Al-Māturīdī refers to the expression, "'Be!' And it is" (*kun fa-yakūn*) in Q. 2:117, 3:47, 3:59, 6:73, 16:40, 19:35, 36:82 and 40:68.



will exist in the future forever despite the difference of their times and places. However, the human mind cannot grasp existentionation that is never occupied nor tired. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Were one to seek to discuss this matter in all its aspects, one would be prevented from reaching the goal. We hope that what we have pointed out will convince people of intelligence and understanding.<sup>298</sup>

## **2.12. Enquiry [al-Ka'bi's Distinction Between the Essential and Active Attributes of God and Its Critique]**

Let us quote some of al-Ka'bi's words so that you can know the extent of his knowledge about God. He encompasses the limit of the Mu'tazila sect in this regard, as according to them, he is the imam of the people of the earth. *Strength comes from God alone.*

### **[2.12.1. Al-Ka'bi's Doctrine on the Distinction Between the Essential and Active Attributes of God]**

1) [Al-Ka'bi] said: The attribute that may vary according to the case and the person is the active attribute, for instance in the saying, "He gives sustenance to such-and-such people [and he refrains from giving to such-and-such people]", and "In one case He shows mercy, in another He does not". The same applies to the attribute of speech [in different cases] and in [addressing] different people. However, the attributes of power, knowledge and life do not vary [according to cases and people]. That is why they are [referred to as the] essential attributes.

2) [Al-Ka'bi] said: Every [attribute] to which power is related is an active attribute, as is the case with mercy and speech. On the other hand, [the attribute that] is not related to [power] is an essential attribute. For example, it is not said, "Does he have the power to know or not?" [Therefore, knowledge is an essential attribute]. Then, it is asked about the essential attribute: "Why is it necessary [for something] to not be described by the opposite of [its essential attribute]?" He said: "That is because [the essential attribute] belongs to its essence, and one's essence never changes, whereas

<sup>298</sup> For further discussion of this attribute, see Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, 175-79.

[to be characterized by the opposite] requires change." Then, he added: "If one's essence never changes, it is impossible for one's essence to change as long as one's essence exists, just as a thing that is necessary due to a cause continues to subsist through its cause."<sup>299</sup>

### [2.12.2. A Critique of al-Ka'bi's Doctrine on the Distinction Between the Essential and Active Attributes of God]

1) Shaykh Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Another remark of al-Ka'bi is as follows: "God has no attributes in reality. [That which is called the attribute of God] only consists of the description of the one who qualifies Him or the naming of the one who names him."<sup>300</sup> However, these two [that is, the essential attribute and the active attribute] exist together in the description of the one who qualifies Him. For they describe Him with knowledge, power, and action, without making any distinction in terms of qualification, and then, in fact, He is truly named knowing, creating and powerful. Therefore, there is no basis for making a distinction [between the attributes] in terms of their function of qualification, because the reality of [the essential attribute and the active attribute] reduces to a common meaning.<sup>301</sup>

2) It can also be said: "He heard the prayer of so-and-so but did not hear the prayer of so-and-so." One says: "God did not know this from me." Again, he says: "He knew from me at this time, He did not know from me at that time." Speaking this way does not require that hearing and knowledge

299 See the discussion in el Omari, *The Theology of Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī/al-Ka'bi* (d. 319/931), 105-6.

300 Al-Māturīdī introduces al-Ka'bi's "concept nominalism". That is, his theory that construes talk of God's attributes as predicate statements. Al-Ka'bi writes: "We do not mean by our statement: It is possible that [God] exercises power after He was not powerful [i.e., that God undergoes change]. We only mean by it that it is not impossible for whoever characterizes Him as powerful." Al-Balkhī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt*, 625. See Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, 198-99; Harvey, "Philosopher of Samarqand," 82-84.

301 Al-Māturīdī here argues that al-Ka'bi's concept nominalism undermines the distinction that he otherwise tries to draw between essential and active attributes, as both kinds of attributes equally come under external description. Compare with el Omari's reading of this passage that puts it in its entirety into the mouth of al-Ka'bi and then posits an idea of "inner harmony" from the final sentence. El Omari, *The Theology of Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī/al-Ka'bi* (d. 319/931), 107-8.



should not be amongst the essential attributes. So, what is it that prevents the same from holding true of the attributes of speaking and mercy?<sup>302</sup>

If he says: He wants to negate that which is known and heard.

It is said to him: The same is true of the first [i.e., speaking], as by negating speaking, He means that He will deprive [them] of the aid<sup>303</sup> of His beneficence and generosity, for speech is something that is intended for beneficence. For example, the believers are given good news by speaking, and the disbelievers are reduced to despair. In our opinion, such is the case.

3) The matter is null and void, because [al-Ka'bi] makes the decision depend on whether it is permissible to use a name [about God]. We have also explained this issue. We know from our previous explanations that it is impermissible to describe God as temporal. If this were permissible, it would be permissible to describe Him [by attributes], such as "correcting", "corrupting", "good" and "evil", which is false. Thus, it has been established that [God] is not characterized by what al-Ka'bi thinks. *Strength comes from God alone.*

4) It is impossible to talk of [God] hearing what is not a sound but permissible to talk of [Him] knowing it. Then, it is not necessary to distinguish between [divine hearing and knowing] with change in the expressions of affirmation, and they do not require a change in God's essence. So, what is

302 Just as al-Ka'bi relies on common ways of speaking, al-Māturīdī has examples of his own, which apparently show essential attributes applying in some cases and not in others. He points out that if these do not remove attributes such as knowledge and hearing from being essential attributes, then the same principle should be applied to speaking and mercy. This also shows that al-Māturīdī does not recognize the Mu'tazilī distinction between the two kinds of attributes in the first place. Rather, divine actions are all essential attributes.

303 Reading MS. 24v as *nafy min 'awn*, rather than *nafy fir'awn* (deprive Pharaoh), as found in K, 50, and TA, 114. Though the latter is more apparent from the manuscript and better grammatically, the Qur'an does not mention God refraining from speaking to Pharaoh. Rather, in verses such as Q. 2:174 and 3:77, God not speaking to people is an eschatological punishment associated with betraying one's religion for material gain. One of the comments that al-Māturīdī makes in commentary on Q. 3:77: "God will not speak to them" is as follows: "It possibly means that God, Mighty and Majestic, ennoble the believers in Paradise with His speech, just as He ennobled Moses in the world. So, He will not speak to them [i.e., the disbelievers] as He speaks to the believers." Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wilāt al-qur'ān*, 2:345. If the reading of *min 'awn* is correct, then it is likely that *fir'awn* was erroneously copied from an earlier textual witness.



it that prevents the same in the case of negation [of the attribute's application to a specific case]?<sup>304</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

5) According to [the Mu'tazila], justice is not God's essential attribute. But it is not permissible that God be described as negating justice. Therefore, [al-Ka'bi's] criterion [for distinguishing between the essential and active attributes] is false.

6) Then, he is asked: "By the active attribute, do you mean [the result of] the action itself, that is, the creation? In your opinion, is the active attribute the same as the action [i.e., creation] or another?" If he says, "It is the creation", he is asked: "Why did you say that the creation is an attribute? Whose attribute is it? After all, a quality can only belong to the one who is described." If he says, "It is God's attribute", it is a blatantly mistaken remark to make His creation an attribute of His, since it involves corruption, ugly things, necessity, incapacity, impurities and filth. Everyone is described by his own quality. No one rational wants to be described by these attributes. So, how is God described by them?

If [al-Ka'bi] says, "[I mean] other than the creatures," he must say that what he means is that [God's] attribute is an action. However, we have established that God is exalted above being described by His creatures. Thus, it becomes clear that God's active attribute is His essential attribute.

7) Again, it is said: God is creator, merciful, and gracious, because His essence is named by these. Similar is the case with the active attribute, that is, the action, and His essence is described by it. For example, it is said: Speech is wisdom, truthfulness, and falsity, depending on which one of these [three qualities] is attributed to it. The same is attributed to God [as an active attribute].

8) It is said to him: "Mercy and forgiveness are active attributes; as are cursing and abusing, according to you. Now, what is the deed that is

304 The argument here is based on considering something that is not a sound, for instance a colored body, which cannot be heard but can be known. Al-Māturīdī argues that if these two essential attributes do not apply uniformly to this object, then this undermines the alleged problem that e.g., God's mercy applies to one person but not to another. Cf. Özervarlı's proposal that al-Māturīdī discusses "an extraordinary secret hearing which he calls "knowing", which ignores the passage's polemical context. Özervarlı, "The Authenticity of the Manuscript of Māturīdī's Kitāb al-Tawhīd," 26.



called mercy and cursing such that it describes God?" If he answers, "[Placing people into] heaven and hell, accepting and rejecting, etc.," his statement, "God is merciful, He does not do this to His servants" is refuted regarding the issues that he mentioned<sup>305</sup> with respect to "the most beneficial (*al-aṣṣlah*)",<sup>306</sup> and "justice and injustice" (*al-ta'dīl wa-l-tajwīr*)<sup>307</sup> – all these are deeds that He does to His servants. If [al-Ka'bi] were to put forward any other meaning, so that [mercy and cursing] are two qualities that describe Him, but are not the same as His creatures, the "abusing" that He pronounces is still [considered by al-Ka'bi] ugly speech and it is impossible to describe Him by it.<sup>308</sup>

9) Again, [al-Ka'bi] is asked: Why have you taken into consideration the criterion you have mentioned in the distinction between the essential and active attributes? You can see that the essential attributes differ in application with respect to affirmation. In fact, God is described by knowledge regarding some things, but not by power; He is described by power, but not by hearing, in some things; He is described by seeing in relation to certain things, but not by generosity; He is described by graciousness and

305 Reading *dhakara* with MS. 25r and K, 52.

306 The doctrine of "the most beneficial" (*al-aṣṣlah*) is a well-known Mu'tazili idea connected with their theodical vision. The basic concept is that it is known by dint of reason that God is obliged to provide certain benefits to human beings. In the more expansive version supported by al-Ka'bi, and the Baghdadi Mu'tazila in general, this would include both the conditions for worldly sustenance and flourishing, as well as what is needed for success in the Hereafter. For members of the Basran Mu'tazila the scope of the doctrine was more restricted and would only extend to the conditions needed for eschatological salvation, which in the context of their beliefs meant avoiding death with an unrepented major sin. Note that in both cases, the Mu'tazili emphasis on human agency meant that good choices must be made by the rational agent to realize the possibilities opened up for them by God's providential care. For further details on the doctrine, see el Omari, *The Theology of Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī/al-Ka'bi* (d. 319/931), 136-40.

307 This is a standard phrase for treatment of questions of divine justice (and negation of divine injustice) in Mu'tazili works. See Shihadeh, "Theories of Ethical Value in *Kalām*," 385-87.

308 The crux of the argument here is to reveal an inconsistency between al-Ka'bi's views on the active attributes and typically Mu'tazili doctrines relating to permissible divine actions. The former commits al-Ka'bi, for instance, to reading divine cursing as something that God creates, for instance by putting certain people into Hell. Yet this is meant to conflict with the latter, which commits God to doing what is best for His creatures. Moving the meaning from the creation to God Himself leads to describing Him with cursing, which is also impossible on their principles.

wisdom in relation to certain things, but not by hearing, and so on in which there is much differing.<sup>309</sup> There is no need to distinguish amongst them; on the contrary, He is described by them in eternity. Why did you not say this [i.e., drawing an essential-active attribute distinction] in all that He is described by? For He is exalted above change and corruption, and these two are signs of temporality and indications of coming into existence after non-existence.

10) The following is also said to [al-Ka'bi]: You divided creatures into classes, arguing that by some of them God is named and by some of them He is not. However, this does not indicate difference with respect to the attribute. What prevents [you] from adopting this approach for the divine attributes?<sup>310</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

11) The Jurist Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Then, [al-Ka'bi] has a saying: "Whatever He is described as having power over is not one of the essential attributes". His opponent [e.g., al-Māturīdī himself] holds that God is not described as having power over any of His attributes, except that He intends the effect figuratively, just as the deed done with a command is also called a command, and so on.<sup>311</sup>

We have stated that although some attributes are agreed upon as being essential, they vary in terms of the wideness or narrowness of the context in which they will be used. Let us say the same about the issue that has been just mentioned.

12) According to [al-Ka'bi's] view, God Most High was not creating and merciful, and He was able to render His essence creating and merciful. It is permissible for us to worship the Merciful, the Creator. Hence, based on

309 This also refutes al-Ka'bi's criterion that suggests that the essential attributes do not vary according to cases and people (*Translator*).

310 Al-Ka'bi understands the divine names in terms of their association with certain creatures in the world. For instance, God is named "merciful" due to some creatures to whom He gives mercy, even if others do not receive it. Al-Māturīdī points out that this variation does not alter the reality of giving mercy in and of itself. But he contends, if that is the case with regard to naming, why not apply it to deriving essential attributes?

311 For God to have power over an attribute in a literal sense is for that attribute to be an aspect of creation and hence not essential. That is not the case for any of the attributes, according to al-Māturīdī.



his position He was able to render for creatures an object of worship, which is [merely] a name that power comes under. Thus, the situation, in reality, is that other than God is worshipped. Additionally, on the basis of these names and due to coming under power, the object of worship is originated.

13) Then, [al-Ka'bi] is asked: "Does God have the power to refrain from creating creatures?" If he says, "No", he makes Him create by necessity or by essence<sup>312</sup> and his doctrine [of volitional creation] is refuted.<sup>313</sup> On the other hand, if he says, "He has the power [not to create]", he is obliged to make the uncreated a creature due to the application of power to it. This affirms the eternity of creatures. *Strength comes from God alone.*

### [2.12.3. A Critique of al-Ka'bi's Doctrine of the Temporality of the Attribute of Speech]

1) As regards the temporality of the attribute of speech, [al-Ka'bi] cites the terms "coming" (*al-ityān*)<sup>314</sup> and "arriving (*al-majī*)",<sup>315</sup> maintaining that speech is temporally generated in this respect. However, as we have explained, when God Most High is described as speaking, He is exalted above the possibility of change and extinction. The same holds true of speech, action and other attributes I have mentioned.

Although God has ascribed "arriving" to Himself, it is not necessary for it to be temporal; on the contrary, it is interpreted [in line with lordship.] The same applies to the first one [i.e., "coming"].

Likewise, arrival should be interpreted in a manner fitting lordship and should not be interpreted as the change and extinction peculiar to creatures. The same applies to the attributes of action and speech. As Abraham [peace be upon him] said: "I love not things that set."<sup>316</sup> One who is in one state first and then is in another is indeed one of those who set. *God knows best.*

312 Lit. "by His own self" (*bi-nafsihi*).

313 This doctrine is presumed by the choice to give or withhold sustenance or mercy, as quoted in 13.1.

314 See Q. 2:106: "Whatever We abrogate from our signs or cause to be forgotten, we come with better than it or its like."

315 See Q. 6:91: "Say: Who revealed the divine Book that Moses arrived with?"

316 Q. 6:76.

[Al-Ka'bi] cites God's protection (*hifz*) of the Qur'an<sup>317</sup> as evidence [for the temporality of the attribute of speech.

Yet [al-Māturīdī responds]:

- i) It may [mean] God protects [the Qur'an].
- ii) It may [mean] the protection of its [legal] boundaries and [all] that the speech contains.

The speech between creatures that is ascribed to God is metaphorical on the basis of the correspondence with the speech known to be His attribute.<sup>318</sup> It [should be interpreted in the same way] as we have mentioned for "coming" and suchlike [i.e., "arriving"], "covenanting", "the help of the Lord" and all that is not taken to have a literal meaning for His essence. The Qur'an gives examples.<sup>319</sup>

[Al-Ka'bi] contends by the copies [of the Qur'an], its suras and its verses as evidence that [God's] speech is temporal, as God is not described in these terms. Then, [al-Ka'bi] returns to claiming that if it is said that [speech] is an essential attribute, like knowledge, it is not said that [God] has [an attribute of] knowledge in reality.<sup>320</sup>

The Jurist (may God have mercy on him) said: What [al-Ka'bi] says is baseless because he is opposed on his doctrine of the essential attribute. Let him say about it what he says in regard to [God] not possessing knowledge in reality, and the same for hearing and other [attributes]. Thanks to God, we have provided sufficient explanation for the intelligent under [that heading].<sup>321</sup>

2) Then, [al-Ka'bi] responded to [the doctrine of the eternity of God's] speech with the idea that it is an action. But there is no difference

317 See Q. 15:9: "We, even We, reveal the Reminder, and lo! We verily are its Guardian."

318 As the Arabic locutions of the Qur'an have the characteristics of temporality, it cannot be a literal description of the divine essence. Hence, it is metaphorically the divine speech due to its correspondence with the essential attribute in eternity. See al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-qur'ān*, 6:296. Also, see Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, 200-2.

319 See Q. 20:115, 22:40, 4:142.

320 That is, he returns to his concept nominalism account of the divine nature. See below.

321 Al-Māturīdī is happy for al-Ka'bi to return to treating divine speech as an essential attribute under his general deflationary account of concept nominalism, because he has comprehensively rebutted it under 13.2.



between the two [i.e., the essential and active attributes because both are eternal] according to his opponents [i.e., the People of Monotheism, such as al-Māturīdī].<sup>322</sup>

3) Then, he responded with the idea that, in the visible world, someone who can [only] possibly speak may be mute or remain silent. He erred in the issue, however, for he should have said "one who can [only] possibly speak may be incapable or remain silent."

He responded with the idea that it is an action, and this is the same according to the opponents [i.e., the People of Monotheism]. In this claim, he invoked acting and refraining from action.<sup>323</sup> However, refraining from action is also an action.<sup>324</sup> Rather, he is confused in what he mentions.

Then, he responded with the idea that a baby [does not speak although he] is not mute. But we have explained that he is incapable of speech. [Al-Ka'bi] is so desperate that he cannot find for himself another analogy to know the Lord, other than babies and the insane!<sup>325</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

[Al-Ka'bi] answered the objection made to him as follows: "One who has the power to act and speak must be in the state of the temporality of power when acting." What makes him say this as evidence is the ignorance of the Mu'tazila. Let him enjoy his conception of monotheism, which is based on such evidence!

4) Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The principle in this matter is as follows: The meaning of being characterized by speech, knowledge, action and praise consists of being free from flaws and elevated above

322 An identification of al-Ka'bi's opponents with *ahl al-sunna* is made on an interlinear note of MS. 26r. Al-Māturīdī does not use this term.

323 As in 2.13.1.

324 See the comments on the range of actions that count as leaving a given act, which are preserved from one of al-Māturīdī's lost works on *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal theory) in al-Samarqandī, *Mizān al-uṣūl fī natā'ij al-'uqūl*, 1:208-9.

325 Al-Ka'bi brings up the case of the baby because it seems to be one in which someone does not speak despite neither being mute nor silent. It would therefore be a counter-example to the principle that as God may not be mute nor remain silent, He essentially speaks. Al-Māturīdī's response, made above and repeated here, is that, for a start, al-Ka'bi draws the wrong analogy from the world. The correct analysis is "incapable or remain silent", which includes the baby. Al-Māturīdī also castigates al-Ka'bi for using such an analogy in the first place.



blemishes, and [God] is such in eternity. Also, if He was [only] creating, forgiving, and speaking due to another, it would be possible that He might not be so. Qualifying [God] by attributes such as "unmerciful, unforgiving, and non-creating" is an expression of vilification, which applies to other than Him from [the category of] creatures. Thus, it has been established that He is merciful, forgiving, and creating. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Were [God] named by things indwelling in another, he would have to be named by everything indwelling in another. Were this possible, one like [God] would be conceivable in the visible world. The impossibility of this in the realm of changing beings indicates that He is exalted above being characterized by [things indwelling in others].<sup>326</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

5) Then, [al-Ka'bi] says: "We mean by attributes that something else is not affirmed [i.e., the attributes, which are external, only point to God]."<sup>327</sup> We do not mean that [the attributes] are His essence; on the contrary, every attribute of something eternal or temporal is other than it. That attribute is either spoken or written. God's attributes are our own speech by which we describe Him, or His speech and His Book. Both of these are temporally generated."<sup>328</sup>

326 The active attributes defended by al-Ka'bi name God through created actions indwelling in bodies. For instance, God is named as speaking, because of speech inhering in His creatures. Al-Māturīdī is pointing out that as God is the creator of the world, by agreement with the Mu'tazila, He should then be named by everything in the world, which would bring Him into the world with absurd consequences.

327 In this passage, al-Ka'bi is working with two different aspects of the conceptualization of God and His attributes. The first idea is a negative one: that God's essential attributes (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) are not something other than God Himself understood as a simple essence. That is stated explicitly below, and here with the negation of "something else" (*thummat ghayr*). His point is to avoid identifying the predicative ground of e.g., God's "knowing" with anything other than the essence. Al-Ka'bi describes the position as follows in his *Kitāb al-maqālāt*: "The essential attributes are not other than Him. They [i.e., the Mu'tazila] only intend by [this statement] that there are not "knowledge" and "power" by which He knows and is powerful, and that they are not two things that are Him [i.e., His essence] or other than Him, or not Him nor other than Him." Al-Balkhī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt*, 258. Hence, within the framework of his own theology, al-Ka'bi negates anything that a distinct essential attribute, e.g., knowledge, could be. This process of negative theology, in which only the simple divine essence serves as the ground for predication, then becomes the basis for explaining the predicate statements themselves through things in the world, i.e., his concept nominalism (see below).

328 The predicate statements that can be made about God are just a temporal verbal or written expression that serves as a sign that points to God in a certain way. This is his "concept nominalism". See 2.12.2 (1).



Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: I have quoted the closing sentences of [al-Ka'bi's] discussion so that you can see how much he knows about God and His attributes. He at once says: "Something else is not affirmed", while not intending that [the attributes] are [God]. Hence, he does not intend by the attributes Him nor other than Him. Is he unaware that this is the doctrine of the People of Affirmation [i.e., those who affirm the attributes]?<sup>329</sup> Then [al-Ka'bi] said: "[The attributes] are our speech, so our speech is, "They are not other than Him," such that we say, "There is not something else."<sup>330</sup> Then, [al-Ka'bi] argued that the attributes of God are what he mentioned, adding, "They are the attributes of the essence". Thus, those which he mentioned are the attributes of the essence, and God has been eternally characterized by them, yet they are other than Him [as statements]! Our Lord is exalted above the things by which false people describe Him.<sup>331</sup>

- 329 This is a polemical point. As discussed above, al-Ka'bi's position is not that of the People of Affirmation. Rather, al-Māturīdī seems to be doing the following: 1) Taking al-Ka'bi's denial of the predicative ground of the essential attribute ("knowing") being other than the essence; 2) Adding al-Ka'bi's affirmation that the predicate statement itself ("God is knowing/has knowledge") must not be the essence; 3) Putting his own formula of "neither Him nor other than Him" in his opponent's mouth. Yet the very fact that this argument is possible shows that, for al-Māturīdī, the position of the People of Affirmation is to deny that the attributes are anything else than the divine essence in its unity, while simultaneously denying that they are identical to that essence. Supporting evidence that, for al-Māturīdī, the formula is linguistically intended to present a pair of contradictories that exhaust the logical options can be shown by an exegetical comment on Q. 32:4: "You have not, beside Him, a protecting friend or intercessor" (*mā lakum min dūnihi min waliyyin wa-lā shafi'*). He writes: "i.e., there is not for these [idolators] a protecting friend, nor a helper, nor an intercessor – not Him and not other than Him (*lā huwa wa-lā ghayruhu*). As for the believers, then He is their protecting friend." Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-qur'ān*, 11:266. Overall, his treatment accords with his idea of divine oneness in 2.7 (5) ii, in which God's unique unity is the basis for the oneness of wholes, parts, and composites within the world. Also, see his invocation of suspension of judgment between God and His attributes in 2.12.3 (8) i a.
- 330 Al-Ka'bi here reiterates his position that the attributes are human speech, and in his case, this means speech that, "They are not other than Him" and, "There is not something else". He here points out that the very expressions under dispute are also God's attributes in his sense.
- 331 Al-Māturīdī is taking aim at the absurdity of al-Ka'bi's position from his perspective. Essential attributes are not something that God can be without. How then can they merely be external things that are temporally generated?



Then [al-Māturīdī] said: "It may be asked: Why do you not accept mercy as a true attribute, so long as God does not name Himself "merciful"?" [Al-Ka'bi] claims [in response] that "merciful" is an attribute, unlike "mercy". For everyone who performs the attribute of a thing is described by it; just as for one who insults or slanders<sup>332</sup> another, [one says]: "He insulted and slandered him." This is the case with creating mercy. It is not permissible to describe God by mercy because He created mercy; to be qualified as such, He must say, "I am merciful". Thus, we know that [God's] attribute is His saying that He is merciful.<sup>333</sup>

Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: How unaware this confused person is of the attributes of God to engage in [their] explanation! God is exalted above the like of this fantasy. Were the attribute to actually consist of the description of the describer, the doctrine that creatures were comprised of substances and accidents would be annulled. Also, it would annul [al-Ka'bi's] view of joining and separation, and motion and stillness, from which substances are not free from due to their temporality, though these may be free from the description of the describer. So, it has been established that these are attributes, which are integral to substances, not what he mentions. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Let us fully reveal [al-Ka'bi's] stupidity, so that you, my brothers, praise God for the knowledge that He has bestowed upon you, and you know the greatness of His wrath at one who claims to have encompassed all the benefits that exist in religion in the sight of God: thus, [he thinks that] even if God would wish that something benefits him, He could not do so, on the contrary He would impair [an already perfect situation]. Let it be clear that he thinks that being forsaken [by God] is beneficial in religion and being led astray by God is one of the blessings of the Lord, may His praise be elevated.<sup>334</sup>

332 Or: "place in power" (*sawwada*). It is thus either an additional negative term for emphasis, or a positive one for contrast.

333 Reading MS. 27r as *annahu raḥīm*, because the phrase *innahu raḥīm* does not appear in the Qur'an.

334 This is criticism of the doctrine of *al-aṣḥāḥ*. If God is already doing what is most beneficial for His creatures, then there is no possible choice that God could make to do something of more benefit for them. Moreover, it would imply that those who are misguided and astray could not have a better circumstance, which is absurd.



[Al-Ka'bi] said: "We do not say that God, when He created redness in a garment, has made an attribute for it. Yet was redness to be an attribute for it, it would be permissible to say that when He created [the redness], He described the garment with it. The same holds true of movement and stillness. Similarly, if someone wrote a letter to someone else and described his height, it is permissible to say: he described [his height] in his letter to us." [al-Ka'bi] claimed this to be clear.

Then, [al-Ka'bi] said: "We do not deny the permissibility of the unrestricted statement that redness is an attribute of the red thing and mercy is an attribute of the action. However, this is metaphorical, and the reality is as I have said."<sup>335</sup>

Then, he was answered with the statement that in this case it would be possible for the attribute to have an attribute.

He said: "Yes, [the attribute has an attribute] in the sense of being described. However, this exists as long as the one speaking qualifies it, and not further if he refrains [from the qualification]."<sup>336</sup>

The Jurist (may God have mercy on him) said: Reflect on the enormity of the position of the Mu'tazila in following this one [i.e., al-Ka'bi] for which this is the extent of His knowledge of the attribute and the one described, the metaphorical and the literal. [This knowledge is] that which, were the most ignorant of the People of Monotheism accused of it, he would condemn it!

335 Al-Ka'bi does not start from the point of affirming a constituent ontology in which objects possess attributes, such as redness. His concept nominalism only formally allows for things to be red when they come under the description of redness made ultimately by God. Yet referring to the redness as an attribute of the object is so ingrained in daily speech that al-Ka'bi allows it so long as it is treated as a metaphor.

336 The further objection here is that if this way of speaking about attributes is accepted, then the attribute, e.g., redness, could possess the further attribute of "being described" (and this is not held to be possible for attributes). The logical flow of the dialectic would suggest that this is an additional response by al-Ka'bi. But it is difficult to see how the stated worry and response arise for him. He has already acknowledged that, on his model, speech of genuine attributes is a mere *façon de parler* with the reality of the attribute resting solely in the external description of the qualified object. In such a case, the idea that the attribute could have a further descriptive attribute does not make much sense, because there is only description in the first place. For this reason, the Editor has previously understood this part of the sequence as an objection from al-Ka'bi to al-Māturīdī. See Harvey, "Philosopher of Samarqand," 83. Possession of a constituent ontology seemingly brings with it more of a worry about the internal properties of objects, such as redness, which then might seem to possess secondary qualities.

Moreover, [al-Ka'bi] will lead his people on the Day of Judgment to the destination [of Hell], the path of which this [enormity] describes.<sup>337</sup> God forbid!

6) Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The principle is that the attribution of speech to God Almighty has been established by evidence from both tradition and reason. The [proof from] tradition is His words: "God directly spoke to Moses."<sup>338</sup> He mentioned [this verse] using the verbal noun (i.e., "speaking" (*taklīm*)). There is no disagreement amongst people about the speech of God [in the sense that] there is consensus that He is a speaker and possesses speech, though there is disagreement over its whatness. I do not deny the attribution of arrogance and ignorance about themselves to those who say: "Why does God not speak to us?" Likewise, His statement: "A party of them used to listen to the word of God [then distort it ...]"<sup>339</sup>

As for the [proof from] reason, if there is one knowing and powerful who does not speak, this is because of a fault or because of weakness or hindrance. God is exalted above it. Therefore, it is established that God speaks. In the visible world, one only does not speak due to a determinant cause, which is [like] that by which he does not hear or see. Yet God is exalted above the determinant cause that requires deafness and blindness. Muteness is the same; in fact, it is even more so. For speech is the greatest source of praise in the visible world, and by it human beings are distinguished from other animals. Also, everyone who has the potential to speak does not either because of a weakness or because [he wants] to be silent.

Then, in putting His speech upon the measure of another, a mutual resemblance would be necessary. But the verse, "Nothing is like Him"<sup>340</sup> negates any similarity in the attribute and essence, and this point is confirmed by the following verse: "[They] created as He created..."<sup>341</sup> This indicates that the similarity of an action requires mutual resemblance. Yet the verses

337 As pointed out in TA, 120, n. 5, this sentence seems an allusion to Q. 11:98: "[Pharaoh] will precede his people on the Day of Judgment and lead them to Hell, a vile destination to be led".

338 Q. 4:164.

339 Q. 2:75.

340 Q. 42:11.

341 Q. 13:16. The verse reads: "Or have they made for God partners who have created as He created, so [their] creation appears similar to them?"



clarify that if the creatures were to come together, they would not be able to produce the like of [the Qur'an].<sup>342</sup> Thus, similarity is negated because it requires likeness. So, difference from the speech of all creatures is established for Him according to what has been established for His essence.

This means that all the speech of the creation was not tried with reaching the extent of its meanings. [God] has mentioned the speech of the ant,<sup>343</sup> the hoopoe<sup>344</sup>, the glorification [of God] by the mountains<sup>345</sup> and other beings, which cannot be understood via alphabetical letters and cannot be compared with human speech. Since it is established that there are types of speech that people cannot assess and cannot comprehend, anyone who attempts to assess the speech of the Lord with [his intellect] is devoid of intelligence. Similarly, His action, exalted is He, is beyond the description of the action of creatures. The fact that [God's speech] is different in every respect negates temporality in that [attribute] with which [the worldly speech] is concordant. Thus, the meaning of such accidents as separation, joining, limit, end, increase and decrease are invalidated in relation to divine speech, because these are the qualities of the speech of creatures. *God alone leads to success.*

Then, either [the attribute] is other than Him, such that the fault that we have mentioned as due to another, which is the sign of neediness and mark of temporality, disappears; or it is not other than Him, so He is by Himself speaking, powerful, knowing.<sup>346</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

7) [The recitation of the Qur'an] heard by creatures is [named] the "speech of God" based on its correspondence [with the divine attribute], just as it is said in letters, lyrical poems and speeches.<sup>347</sup> The evidence for this is that [the thing heard] is a creature and it is impossible for it to belong to God's essence. In addition, that which is heard is either an accident, so it is impossible to exist in two places [in the essence of God and the one who

342 Q. 17:88.

343 Q. 27:18.

344 Q. 27:20; Q. 21:79.

345 Q. 21:79.

346 Any given quality is either marked by contingency or temporality, so that it is applied to the creation, or it is not, in which case it is one of God's essential attributes. See the Editor's Introduction, and under 2.12.3 (5) and 2.12.3 (8) i a.

347 When someone reads or performs the words of someone else, the words that are heard are attributed to the author due to their correspondence with the intent of the author. See al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-qur'ān*, 6:297-98.

recites]; or it is a body, which cannot exist in two places; or it is neither, so it is impossible to be in place. Yet it is heard in a certain place [so cannot be neither]. Thus, the relation of that which is heard to God [and its being called "the speech of God"] has been established as we have explained. Also, God can make us hear His speech through something that is not His speech, just as we make others hear our own speech even if that is with something that is not identical with it,<sup>348</sup> and just as God has informed us of His power, knowledge and lordship through His creatures, even though they are not the same as Him. *God alone leads to success.*

If someone says: When God says, "God directly spoke to Moses,"<sup>349</sup> did He make Moses hear His speech?

It is said: He made him hear His speech in Moses' language through letters and a voice He created. Therefore, He made Moses hear the uncreated [through such created means].

8) The method of suspension of judgment [regarding the attribute of speech].

i) [This] can be practiced in two ways:

a) To say that [the attribute of speech] is neither God nor other than Him. This is a suspension of judgment based on knowledge [i.e., one knows that this attribute is neither the same nor other than God]. This is a reality as was established with respect to knowledge and power.<sup>350</sup>

348 For instance, through written and oral reports.

349 Q. 4:164.

350 Al-Māturīdī here invokes a "suspension of judgment" (*waqf*) in connection with the "neither God nor other than Him" (*laysa huwa allāh wa-lā ghayruh*) formula as it defines the attribute of speech in relation to God, and by extension other attributes. This harks back to the initial historical circumstances in which the attributes controversy entered into Islamic theological discourse through external debate with other religious traditions and internal debate on the status of the Qur'an. The formula seems to have been first used in the context of discussing the attribute of a bodily object by the second/eighth-century Kufan dualist Abū Shākir al-Daysānī. It is reported that he "affirmed motion, claiming that is an attribute of the moving, neither it nor other than it, and denied that [motion] was a thing or not a thing" (*yuthbitu al-ḥaraka wa-yaz'umu annahā šifa li-l-taḥarruk lā hiya huwa wa-lā ghayruh wa-ankara an takūn shay' aw takūn lā shay'*). 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*, 5:20. This was taken on directly by Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795-96) and subsequently others. See van Ess, *Theology and Society, Volume 1*, 512-13. That at its origin within the Islamic tradition the formula deals with a pair of contradictories is shown by the use of "was a thing or not a thing" as a gloss within the report. The formula was deployed by figures faced with



b) To fail to know whether the attribute of speech is a creation or something else [i.e., God]. This is a wrong attitude, for there is no escape from following traditional authority,<sup>351</sup> and most people deny that [position]. Rather, they agree that it is necessary to know whether the attribute of speech is a creature or something else.<sup>352</sup>

ii) Then, one either knows:

a) God speaks essentially, which is the sense that I have mentioned.

b) Or He does not speak essentially, so [speech] is other than Him. Everything other than God is a creature, whether it is narrated from tradition or not.<sup>353</sup> It is established that attributing otherness to God requires temporality. This requires createdness, because createdness comes from temporality.

the question of whether the Qur'an was created and thereby "other" (*ghayr*) than God or not. These Suspenders (*wāqifa*) received criticism from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) in the third/ninth century, who drew the implication that if they do not say that the Qur'an is "not created", then it is "created" – again a contradictory pair. Al-Ash'arī, *Al-Ibāna*, 28. Abū Sa'īd al-Dārimī (d. 280-82/893-95) also reports the Suspenders as saying about the Qur'an: "We do not say it is created and not other than created" (*lā naqūlu makhlūq huwa wa-lā ghayr makhlūq*). Al-Dārimī, *Al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyya*, 175. Al-Māturīdī's treatment in this section is to apply suspension of judgment to deny that the attribute of speech is God or other than Him, while rejecting its use for whether it is a creation or not. He thus repurposes the formula for a cautious statement about the divine attributes while avoiding the perceived excesses of the Suspenders. The same conception of *waqf* in relation to the attributes formula is continued by al-Māturīdī's early successors in Samarqand. See al-Samarqandī, "Jumal uṣūl al-dīn," 35-36. It is later dropped in the classical Māturīdī tradition while retaining the formula itself as expressing the intrinsic nature of the attributes in relation to God. See al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adilla*, 1:300. As can be seen from the basic context of the formula's introduction, his unambiguous use of it elsewhere (under 2.12.3 (5)) and the idea of *waqf* itself, the negation of the term *ghayr* in al-Māturīdī's version does not merely mean that the attributes cannot be "absent" from God's essential nature. That they cannot be so absent is, of course, both a necessary implication of his use of *waqf* and follows from his basic concept of essential attributes, as in 2.12.2 (9). When al-Māturīdī wants to specify the concept of inseparability, he uses the term *ghayr mufāriq*. See under 2.1.3.1 (7).

351 The phrase used is *yadhhaba madhhab al-taqlīd*. This relates back to the argument in the Introduction that everyone must rely on tradition to some extent. In al-Māturīdī's view, this does not remove the simultaneous need for rational inquiry.

352 The scope of the traditional authority is important here. That it is not acceptable to suspend judgment based on not knowing whether God's speech is created or not is an epistemic standard set by the community.

353 Unlike in 2.12.3 (8) i b (just above), tradition does not set the principle that everything other than God is created. This is known by reason.



c) Or one does not know whether He speaks essentially or not, so his suspension of judgment comes from having no knowledge of it. The duty of such a person is to learn because there is no proof leading him to adopt such an attitude and speak from it. It is just ignorance.

d) Or one's suspension of judgment is due to the fact that he does not know the questioner's intent. That is, he does not know what he means by the speech of God and the Qur'an: is it the divisible and separable [written and spoken text] or something that cannot be qualified as such? This is according to the description that we have explained. Therefore, it is most appropriate that one abstains from answering someone who asks him about speech ambiguously until he knows what he intends by it. *God knows best.*

### 2.13. Enquiry [into the Fact that the Actions of God are by Choice]

Al-Ka'bī said: "The acts of God occur by choice because the act of what happens by nature is uniform."

Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: This statement of al-Ka'bī is good and it is the teaching of the People of Monotheism.<sup>354</sup> However, this statement is meaningless according to his school. This is because it is said: creatures are either the same as His choice or other than it and likewise for His acts [i.e., because, according to al-Ka'bī, God's acts are just what He creates.]<sup>355</sup>

1) [In response to this], if al-Ka'bī says, "[Creatures are the same as God's] choice," then the meaning of His acts would be the same as His choice. Therefore, it would be mistaken to say that His acts are by choice;

354 The term "People of Monotheism" (*ahl al-tawhīd*) is consistently used by al-Māturīdī where one would expect the term *ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā'a*. It seems that the more familiar terminology was adopted soon after his death by his student Abū al-Ḥasan al-Rustughfani. Cf. Harvey, "The Case of the Missing Disciple," 109-110. Note the following point of correction on the Editor's cited article: "People of Truth" (*ahl al-ḥaqq*) is a term reported from others by al-Māturīdī in *The Book of Monotheism* but not used by him to describe his affiliation.

355 Al-Māturīdī agrees with al-Ka'bī's distinction between God's action by choice and things that act by nature. But al-Māturīdī seeks to show that he cannot hold this position. The way that he does this is to invoke the principle, to which al-Ka'bī subscribes, that the act of existentiatio is the same as the thing brought into existence and to pose the dilemma that follows.



on the contrary, His acts are the same as choice, and there is no "other" [than the acts/creatures themselves] in order to be able to say what he says [i.e., "God's acts are by choice"].<sup>356</sup>

2) If he says [in response], "[Creatures are] other than [God's choice]," then either that [choice] is His act, so it is necessary that there are unending choices – this, however, is impossible because the creation is finite – or it is an act without a choice. In this case, [al-Ka'bī's] statement, ["God's actions are by choice]" loses its validity. Such [an argument] has force against whoever describes God with will in eternity, which is to choose that a thing exists in its own time.<sup>357</sup>

Then, in our opinion, the evidence that God's acts are by choice is the fact that creatures – despite the diversity of their whatnesses – emerge in a wise manner and indicate the oneness of God. That shows that God has chosen everything to be as it is. *Strength comes from God alone.*

## **[2.14. Various Doctrines on the Generation of the World and A Critique of Them]**

[1) There are various doctrines on the generation of the world that seek a natural explanation.]

i) Some people hold that the generation of creatures depends on natures and nutrients.

ii) Some see it as the work of the stars, the Sun and the Moon.

iii) Some explain it as due to the revolution of the heavenly spheres.

iv) Others speak about procreation through the rearing of parents.

All these explanations return to the generation of one thing due to another. If no beginning is established [for this generation], it loses its validity

356 In this first case, in which creatures are the same as God's choice, then so are the divine acts of creation. Hence, there is no way for those acts to be by His choice, as they are nothing but His choice. This targets the Mu'tazili position that makes God's will temporal. See 6.12-6.13.

357 In the second case, in which creatures are other than God's choice, there are two sub-options: 1) God's choice is itself an additional temporal act, in which case that act would need a further temporal act of choice *ad infinitum* for only a finite number of creatures; 2) God's act occurs without choice at all, which nullifies the initial statement of the section. This argument can be extended to anyone who holds that God has an eternal will but not eternal creative action, since such a scenario leads to an infinite regress of temporal acts.

due to the evidence described earlier.<sup>358</sup> If it is established that [this generation], or each kind of it, has a beginning, it would be impossible for it to come into existence by itself. This is because either:

a) It would generate itself during its non-existence. However, it is impossible for a thing to bring [something] into existence when it itself does not exist. In addition, it is not possible for non-existence to reach a being that governs everything. For if it were possible for it to bring itself into existence, it would also be possible for it to make itself cease to exist, which is contradictory.

b) Or [the world brings itself into existence] after it comes into existence. Thus, it is established that it came into existence through another. *God alone leads to success.*

2) Also, all the things mentioned above [in the four explanations] are inanimate, except for parents. Nevertheless, parents cannot attain their children's ultimate origins through rearing and children do not turn out as their parents had hoped. If children are impaired, the parents cannot rectify them because they cannot reach the hidden things [i.e., in the womb], let alone assess them. There are other aspects that disprove [the claim that creatures were brought into existence by their parents]. The class of the dead are unaware of their useful aspects and the aspects that may hinder [their usefulness]. It is, hence, established that whatever exists by nutrients and natures can only exist due to a wise and omniscient one making it so. He makes everything as it is in terms of benefit and harm due to the requirements of other [entities].

There are powers in animals such as hearing, seeing, and specifically in humanity, speaking, discernment and knowing the truth of things, which do not exist in the traces of [the nutrients and natures] described. These powers are not present in the animals' initial stages of development, and they develop only through the nutrition provided by the parents. However, [nutrition] stops having its effects [on the parents when they age]. So, how [does it have an effect by itself] on the children?<sup>359</sup>

<sup>358</sup> See the arguments discussed in 2.1.

<sup>359</sup> The idea is that if nutrition was truly responsible for the development of powers, it would continue to cause its effects on adults.



Moreover, every organism has a limit and when it reaches that limit, its height, width, hearing, sight and mental power do not increase. On the contrary, each of them gradually decreases despite the availability of food and care. Therefore, it is understood that this is not [solely] through [the above factors, such as parents, food, and natures] but because of one who is essentially knowing, such that nothing escapes Him, who is powerful in Himself, such that nothing can incapacitate Him, lofty is His praise.

Each of the kinds of bodily substances we have mentioned is corruptible and restorable. They are all [composed] of contrary and repelling [natures] that cannot [independently] aggregate to support each other. Therefore, it has been established that [these substances] have reached their state due to other than them. This is because everything with a certain aspect in itself does not change so long as that self remains. *We ask God for protection.*

3) In the perceived world, all organisms have needs and desires that overcome and dominate them, without which they would not need sustenance. When [food] is present, it is the cause of satiation, such that the desires and the needs abate. Desires and needs cannot exist on their own [i.e., without God] for the following reasons:

i) The existence of something by itself, without another, is proof of sufficiency, and it is impossible for this to turn into need.<sup>360</sup>

ii) It is impossible for something that has a certain aspect essentially to disappear, yet satiation can be caused by something else.<sup>361</sup>

iii) It is impossible for something to need another due to its own self; on the contrary, if it needs another due to its own self, this need will continue so long as its own self exists.<sup>362</sup>

So, it has been established that there is another one [i.e., God] who creates living things dependent on needs, combines the desires in them, then creates the means that will satiate them and fulfill their desires. Thus,

360 If the world existed on its own, it would be self-sufficient, and need would never arise. But need does arise, so there must be an external agent, God. See his argument from natural evil in 2.2 (3).

361 If things in the world were essentially needy, they could not be satiated. But satiation does occur, hence there is an external agent, God.

362 If things in the world were needy due to their own selves, then so long as those selves persisted, there would be no possibility of their satiation.

that which is used to disprove the existence of a knowledgeable governor of the world becomes a means for proving it. *Strength comes from God alone.*

4) Each of the substances and accidents in the world has been put in the service of and subjugated to [other things]. But if that were not the case, it would be easier and more pleasant for it. For example, [the state of being in] constant stillness or successive flux is that from which a thing can live alone but cannot be the means of life [for another].<sup>363</sup> Thus, the whole world is in the manner I have described. It is impossible for a thing that has been placed under the service and command of another to govern itself in such a way as to be free from it and its sustenance. It is not able to rid itself of [the state of] being subjugated and in service. Hence, it has been established that there is an omniscient governor for all of it who knows the needs [of creatures] and is free of them. So, He created them in this manner.

In addition, [creatures] need each other to sustain and endure, but they are ignorant of the aspect by which they are needy and incapable of removing the need from themselves. Thus, it has been established that all people have an omniscient governor by which their affairs are governed.

If the one who is the most intelligent and greatest in governance amongst the people was given the task of assessing his own states and actions in terms of the subtleties of time and space, he could not cope with this task. Those who are beneath him [in these qualities] cannot do it at all. Again, no one can remove the dominion of time and the encirclement of space from him. Thus, it has been established that it is impossible for the world in its current form to come into existence on its own without an external determinant cause to encompass its needs. Rather, [its cause] is self-subsistent, knowing and powerful. *Strength comes from God alone.*

5) Again, as for one who says that the primordial matter (*ṭīna*) of the world is eternal:

i) Either [primordial matter] is from the [same] substance as these meanings [i.e., of needs, desires etc.], so what applies to the world applies

363 If something was either purely static or purely chaotic, it would not need anything else to exist and nor could it be the basis for other things to exist. This would (in a sense) be easier for that thing.



to it, and its substance reveals its powerlessness and dependence, which are signs of the world's temporal generation and dependence upon another. Thus, the same judgment applies to [primordial matter] as applies to the other [i.e., the world].<sup>364</sup>

ii) Or [primordial matter] is extraneous to that substance [in the world] and is an independent and powerful entity unaffected by needs and unopposed by desires that prompt one to [seek] the means of refuge in another, which one hopes will support and give strength. The world is generated from [primordial matter] such that some accidents appear in [primordial matter] and change its substance from its prior state. Thus, [the primordial matter] turns into these needs and desires, becoming in its substance receptive to every need and the locus for every desire, susceptible to transformation and change. So, all the qualities of independence and power are nullified, and it becomes the origin of needs and the wellspring of desires. Its governance must pass to one wise and knowledgeable. Indeed, this must be the case with the whole world.

iii) Or [primordial matter] remains in its own state but the world has manifested in actuality after it existed in [the primordial matter] in potential. This doctrine is held by the followers of prime matter. Yet this indicates that everything in the world is destroyed, one thing in another, when the things in potentiality come into actuality. For example, this is what they say about living creature in the sperm; every animal in the seed or the egg; the crop in the grain; the tree in the seed; and all bodily substances are like this.<sup>365</sup> According to them, [food is destroyed in the same way] in the case of nutrition and growth [i.e., of animals]. Therefore, it is necessary that is [also] the case for the primordial matter that they profess, and likewise for the prime matter, as the two are the source for the entire world.<sup>366</sup>

364 Al-Māturīdī begins an exhaustive list of options as to the identity of primordial matter. In this first option, such matter is subject to the needs and desires introduced in 2.15 (3). This leads swiftly to its eternity being negated.

365 That is, the sperm and egg are destroyed when the animal is formed, the grain is destroyed when the crop is formed, and the seeds are destroyed when the tree is formed (*Translator*).

366 The idea of potentiality being destroyed by its corresponding actuality belies the idea that the primordial matter can stay in its own state.



Similarly, the Qarmatians<sup>367</sup> are forced by their doctrine – that the whole world is manifested by the First Creator (al-Mubdi' al-Awwal), such that the Universal Soul (al-Nafs al-Kull) is drawn from Him, prime matter is extended from Him, and from it the world is built – to hold that the First is destroyed, as this is the reality of everything, one in another, when the things in potentiality come into actuality.

[The proponents of the above positions] have all taken the present world as evidence for the primary constituent, yet the First is the substance of the whole whereas the Second [i.e the present world] is the substance of the part. The substance of the whole becomes known through the substance of the part, as it is impossible to reach [the whole] through any senses. *God alone leads to success.*

Since this is established, all the temporally generated things and needs that we have mentioned are also established. [These temporally generated things and needs] are evidence for the temporality of the source because it is liable to destruction and annihilation.<sup>368</sup> [The ruling on the source] also applies to the Qarmatians, who regard [the First Creator] as everlasting, though they say, "[The First Creator] originated through creation from nothing after He did not exist." *Strength comes from God alone.*

6) The [source] is unaware of the states of the things that it potentially has in itself, nor does it know what and who is in it, and what will exist. As I have mentioned, sperm and grain etc. are ignorant [of the animal and crop that will emerge in the future]. Therefore, the same is required with respect to prime and primordial matter, and what they say [about them]. [Prime and primordial matter] do not have the power to govern and nothing originates because of them. But if something originates, it does so thanks to [an agent] who knows what will happen. Hence, its source is manifest in it in potential, emerging into actuality according to what [the agent] makes for it in terms of materials and locations for it to grow.

367 The Qarmatians were a branch of Ismā'īlīs active in al-Māturīdī's milieu. During his lifetime, the adoption of Neoplatonic philosophy had only just occurred in Transoxiana due to the activities of Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 332/943). See Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 170. Also, see 2.19 (2).

368 Al-Māturīdī argues that the only way to know about the alleged eternal source of the world is through the changing world of experience. Yet if the source is liable to destruction and annihilation, then it must itself be changing and temporal.



This means adopting the doctrine of monotheism, and that [God] is the creator of everything. This is because everything comes to exist from [God], either: (i) [through the primary constituents] as they say; or (ii) as the originator of everything that will exist forever as He wills, whether from sources or from nothing; or (iii) how He wills, as the People of Monotheism say.<sup>369</sup>

Just as God, exalted is He, can originate a source in which everything is manifest, He can originate everything as He wills from nothing, without emergence from potential to actuality, but rather by determination and existentionation. If they claim that things are hidden with their substances in the source and then manifest in actuality, this account also amounts to what we say. For this is their position on the sperm and grain. However, the mind rejects this because a thing that is several times larger than another cannot fit into it with its substance. [To claim the opposite] is contradictory, false and contrary to the observation.

Or, that source, which they name primordial matter, prime matter, Creator, or Universal Soul, is able to originate the world, not by becoming it, but by action and existentionation as He wills, how He wills, such that no one can oppose His decree, and no one can contradict His governance. This is the position of monotheism. But they [merely] call Him by different names than those used for the originator and creator of the world by the People of Monotheism.<sup>370</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

### 2.15. Enquiry: [The Names of God Mighty and Majestic]

Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: According to us, one may speak on the names of God Mighty and Majestic by staying within the semantic scope of the term in the [following three] ways:

1) [The first] kind of [divine names] returns to our naming of God. These are different from Him because our word "omniscient" is different

369 The point is that notwithstanding the apparent possibilities about how the world came into existence – though he dismisses all except (iii) – there is no rational option for an eternal world without God as the creator.

370 This is an excellent point of transition to the next section.

from our word "omnipotent."<sup>371</sup> Such reports as, "God Most High has such-and-such a name" are compared to this. That is like saying, "[God] created such-and-such mercy", but this does not mean that He is merciful through this created mercy. For it is impossible for Him to be unmerciful at the start of its creation or likewise unmerciful until He created that mercy and made it one among His creatures;<sup>372</sup> on the contrary, [that mercy came into existence] thanks to the mercy of God and was named after Him. Such is the case with the names "Paradise" and "rain".<sup>373</sup> On this basis, it is said about the acts of worship, "They are God's command", for they exist due to it, not that they are it. His knowledge and power are spoken about like this when the intent is its object of knowledge and of power because that is its cause.<sup>374</sup> Hence, it is like the earlier [situation]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

2) The meaning of the second kind of names returns to the essence of God, and creatures can only know the meaning of His essence through these names, though He is exalted above the letters that enable understanding. [These names] differ according to languages in keeping with the reality of His essence. For instance: the One, God, the Gracious, the Existent, the Eternal, the Worshipped, etc.

3) The third category of the names are those derived from the attributes, such as "knowing" and "powerful". If other than [these names] were taken as real, they could be exchanged.<sup>375</sup> On the other hand, if it was possible to name God by these names without taking what is understood from the meaning as real, it would be possible to name God by all the names used to name other than Him.<sup>376</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

371 If the names were identical with God, there would be no difference between the two names (*Translator*).

372 This language refers to the hadith: "God created one hundred [parts of] mercy, placing one among His creatures, keeping with Him ninety-nine." Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Tawba, 4.

373 The names "Paradise" and "rain" came into existence because God created them for those two things; Paradise and rain did not become what they are because of their names (*Translator*).

374 Similar to his example of mercy, al-Māturīdī gives other instances when an aspect of the creation is named as if it was a divine quality. Hence, the act of worship being named "God's command".

375 That is, as the names derive from God's attributes, they follow whatever attributes God is understood to possess. In themselves, the names are created as explained under 2.15 (1).

376 If these names were not to derive from God's attributes, then He could be named anything.



Then, whoever considers these names to be temporal and does not affirm that God has knowledge in eternity [i.e., al-Ka'bi] is asked: What was the state of God before the creation? Did He know His essence or act, or did He not? Similarly, did He know Himself as a thing, or did He not? If He did not know Himself, then He had been ignorant until He originated knowledge and became a knower through it. If He knew Himself, did He know His essence as a knower, or not? If he knew Himself as a knower, it is necessary to profess that He has this name in eternity – there is a corruption of [God's] oneness in the otherness of the name.<sup>377</sup>

According to the opinion of those who deny the attributes, the principle is [as follows]: since this name does not obtain for [God] and there is no attribute of knowledge by which He knows Himself in eternity, the opinion of Jahm<sup>378</sup> becomes necessary in negating the names and attributes and [making them] temporal. Thus, God is neither knowing nor powerful, then He knows. God is exalted above this.

Then he is asked: How was He [in eternity?] If [God] knows that He was like that [i.e., knowing] in eternity, then He requires the name accordingly. Or He knows that he is not [knowing], such that the name of ignorance is attached to Him. This is the result of their doctrine because they define knowledge as the negation of ignorance.<sup>379</sup> Hence, if He is not knowing in eternity, then He will be ignorant therein. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Then [the attribute] of knowledge is spoken of, since [according to them] it did not exist until it originated. So, this is necessary in everything [i.e., in all attributes]. In addition, it is said to him: How did [the attribute of knowledge] originate for [God] when He had no power? Or [it originated] through another, so that their [belief in] monotheism becomes invalid.

377 This category of name is derived from possession of the attribute. Therefore, for God's name to be other than Him, that is, to be a creation, it would mean that God does not eternally possess an attribute of knowledge. Thus, change and contingency would enter into the divine essence, and oneness is corrupted.

378 Jahm b. Šafwān (d. 128/745-46) was a very early Muslim speculative theologian known for highly transcendent positions, including the idea that God was not a "thing" nor could take predications. See Schöck, "Jahm b. Šafwān (d. 128/745-6) and the 'Jahmiyya' and Dirār b. 'Amr (d. 200/815)," 58-65. Those opposed to *kalām* in general would use the pejorative *Jahmī* for its practitioner, whereas theologians, such as al-Māturīdī, would invoke his name against the Mu'tazila, especially for their rejection of distinct divine attributes.

379 See van Ess, *Theology and Society*, Vol. 4, 179.

Then, it is said to him on the matter I have mentioned: Either God knew His essence before He created [the attribute of knowledge for Himself] or He had no knowledge in reality, so how did He know His essence? If He knew it as one who is knowing, his claim that the name is temporal is invalidated. If he says: He was not knowing, nor was He capable of it, all the things I mentioned would apply to it<sup>380</sup> along with the impossibility for Him to be qualified by knowledge in eternity and the corruption of what we have explained with respect to the temporality [of the attribute of knowledge]. If he states that God will be qualified as knowing later and through another, he sees Him as one of the things [such as the prime or primordial matter etc.] in which accidents appear and from which the world is generated. This means holding the same view as the Dahrīs in [the doctrine of] primordial matter, and the same as the followers of the doctrine of prime matter and the Dualists in the world coming to be generated through the emergence of accidents in the source. *Strength comes from God alone.*

In fact, this matter is related to that of the attributes in reality, which we have already explained.

## 2.16. Enquiry: An Explanation of the Throne

Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Then, the People of Islam differed in their views about [attributing] a place [to God].

1) Some have claimed that God is characterized as sitting (*mustawin*) upon the Throne. For them, the Throne is the raised seat that is borne and surrounded by the angels. This is according to His statement: "[And the angels will be on the sides thereof], and eight will uphold the Throne of your Lord above them that day."<sup>381</sup> Another statement of His is: "And you (O Muḥammad) shall see the angels thronging round the Throne"<sup>382</sup> Also: "Those who bear the Throne, and all who are around it [sing the praises of their Lord]."<sup>383</sup> Again, for this opinion, they cite the following verse as evidence: "The Beneficent One, who is established on the Throne."<sup>384</sup>

380 In other words, the attribute of knowledge originates through another, and in this case the belief of monotheism becomes invalid (*Translator*).

381 Q. 69:17.

382 Q. 39:75.

383 Q. 40:7.

384 Q. 20:5.



[Another basis for attributing a location to God] is that people raise their hands to the heaven while praying and expect blessings. Again, these people say: God went there after He was not there, due to His statement: "Then He mounted the Throne."<sup>385</sup>

2) Others say that God is in every place, according to His statements: "There is no secret conference of three but He is their fourth...";<sup>386</sup> "We are nearer to him than his jugular vein";<sup>387</sup> "And We are nearer unto him than you are, but you see not";<sup>388</sup> "And He is the one who is a deity in the heaven and in the earth."<sup>389</sup>

They think that if God were in one place rather than another, this would require a limit, and one who is limited is inferior to one who is greater, which is an imperfection and a deficiency, and therefore requires a place.<sup>390</sup> Such also requires limitation as it is impossible that God be greater than the place, because choosing a place that one cannot fit within is generally considered folly. Thus, the limit of place becomes His limit. Our Lord is mighty and exalted above this.

3) Others refuse to describe Him as being in a place; they negate all places [for Him] except metaphorically in the sense of Him being the protector and sustainer of places.

4) Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The summary of that is as follows: attributing all things to Him and relating Him, mighty and majestic, to them means He is described by exaltation and loftiness, and means His glorification and majesty. This is like His statement: "Unto Him belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth...";<sup>391</sup> "Lord of the heavens and the earth",<sup>392</sup> the deity of the creation, "the Lord of the worlds",<sup>393</sup> He is above everything,<sup>394</sup> and so on. Attributing a specific thing

385 Q. 7:54.

386 Q. 58:7.

387 Q. 50:16.

388 Q. 56:85.

389 Q. 43:84.

390 This is listed as the position of the Mu'tazila, Khawārij, Zaydis and Murji'is in al-Ka'bī, *Maqālāt*, 244.

391 Q. 25:2.

392 Q. 37:5.

393 Q. 1:2.

394 Q. 6:18.

to Him means to single it out with nobility, position and bestowal for whatever has its substance. This is as He says: "God is with those who are mindful of Him...,"<sup>395</sup> "And the mosques are only for God",<sup>396</sup> "the she-camel of God",<sup>397</sup> "God's house",<sup>398</sup> etc. None of that [i.e., the relation of these things to God] can be understood through the relation of creatures to one another, nor should its possibility within the creation be denied. For to attribute a specific thing to God means to give it preference, while the general thing means the superiority of [His] sovereignty and protection.<sup>399</sup>

Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The basic principle is that God, exalted is He, was without place, and it is possible that [all] places go, and He remains as He was, such that He is as He was, and He was as He is now. He is exalted above change, disappearance, transformation and perishability, as these are the signs of temporality by which the world's temporality is known, and by which the possibility of annihilation is indicated. There is no difference between going from state to state – based on knowledge that the first state is non-essential, as whatever has a necessary essence cannot possibly disappear – and between a non-essential entity, because it can receive accidents and shift states. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Then, to affirm place for Him as real and to characterize Him as being by His essence in every place makes it possible that He needs a thing to settle on [i.e., the Throne]. [This is] like all bodies and accidents, which are established in the places in which they fluctuate and settle, though they are free as a whole [that is, the world,] from being described with place.<sup>400</sup> Therefore, He who creates and holds all [bodies and accidents] is far exalted above being in need of place or being described in the same way as the world: not in a place in its entirety, but in a place in its parts.

395 Q. 16:128.

396 Q. 72:18.

397 Q. 91:13.

398 Q. 106:3.

399 That is, attributing something specific to God, here the Throne, amounts to singling out that thing. This is contrasted with attributing the general, for instance the heavens and the earth, which points to divine authority.

400 Place is essentially a relative description. If the entire creation is considered at once, there is no spatial reference for it. See 2.5.1 (4) and 3.1 (6).



Then, if God were made to be in a place, He would be made to be in a place with respect to the parts of the world, which is a sign of imperfection. On the contrary, if it is correct that the entire world is established as not in a place when taken as a whole, then establishing [God] in that [i.e., not in a place] is more worthy and prior.<sup>401</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

5) Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The doctrine of being on the Throne, which is a site, has the meaning of Him being in His essence or being in all places, and is subject to [one of the following options]: either [the Throne] surrounds God, or it is equal to Him, or He exceeds [the Throne] and surrounds it. In the first case, God is limited and surrounded by [the Throne], and inferior to the creation because He is less than it. If it were possible to characterize Him in His essence as surrounded by places, it would be possible to qualify Him as being surrounded by times, so He would be finite in His essence and less than His creation.<sup>402</sup> In the second case [that is, if He is equal to the Throne], had He been more than the creatures, He may have been less, as well.<sup>403</sup> Thus, this is something like the first option. As for the third case, it is an unpleasant situation that indicates neediness and the inability to create something that He does not exceed.<sup>404</sup> In addition, it is considered blameworthy for the thrones of kings to not exceed them. Moreover, this requires being divided in such a way that some of it [i.e., the world] possesses parts and some of it exceeds that, whereas all of it is the description of creatures. God is exalted above that.

Furthermore, there is no honor and loftiness in climbing up to a high place to sit or stand, nor is it characterized by greatness and exaltation. [This is] like the person who climbs the roofs or the mountains; he does

401 If based on the prior arguments, even the entire created world (when considered as a whole) lacks a place, then how can one be applied to God?

402 Al-Māturīdī parallels time with space, negating both from God. Note that both are relational elements within creation, that is, they are strictly speaking concepts rather than ontic realities. God's utter transcendence from creation means that such ideas simply do not apply to Him.

403 The idea seems to be that God being equal in size to the creation is an inherently unstable concept. If He is exactly the same size as the world, then that is a contingent truth that could have been otherwise: He could have been larger and therefore could have been smaller than it.

404 Even if God exceeds and surrounds the Throne, it still implies an aspect of contingency: that He could not have created a Throne that He does not exceed.



not deserve to be elevated above whoever is beneath him due to ascending [above their] bodily substance. Therefore, it is impossible to take the verse to mean it [that is, to say that God's establishment upon the Throne means loftiness]. In addition, greatness and majesty are mentioned in [the verse] because it is stated in His speech Most High: "Your Lord is God Who created the heavens and the earth [in six days, then He established Himself upon the Throne]."<sup>405</sup> This leads to the glorification of the Throne; the knowledge of creatures cannot reach what it was created from, whether light or bodily substance. There is a narration reported from the Prophet (peace be upon him) that he described the Sun [as follows]: "Gabriel brings to [the Sun] a handful of the light of the Throne, and on every day when it rises, he dresses it [in that light] just as one of you dresses in his shirt." He also mentioned "a handful of the light of the Throne" about the moon.

i) Therefore, "establishing [Himself upon the Throne]" is ascribed to Him in two respects:

a) First, glorification of [the Throne] by mentioning it immediately after mentioning His sovereignty in His lordship and His creation of what He stated.

b) In specific mention of the loftiest and most sublime creature. Indeed, according to the common view, lofty states are attributed to the loftiest things. For example, it is said: "So-and-so attained dominion in such-and-such land and established himself in such-and-such a place. This is not merely due to specifying that in reality [the king attained dominion], but that it is known that whoever has dominion of that [land], then he has even more right for what is less than it. In the same way, His statement, Most High, can be understood: "Today I have completed your religion for you..."<sup>406</sup> This is because the mother city [i.e., Mecca] became his, and the disbelievers gave up their hopes on [defeating] his religion. Likewise, the fact that the prophets who were cited [in the Qur'an] were sent to the pharaohs and mother cities does not mean that they were sent only to them, on the contrary, this is meant to remind of the greatness of the matter. So, the same holds true for the Throne. It is His statement: "[We have made

405 Q. 7:54.

406 Q. 5:3.



in every town] the influential to be from its criminals, [to scheme in it]”,<sup>407</sup> and “[And when We would destroy a township] We send injunction to its folk who live at ease”,<sup>408</sup> although others joined them.

ii) [Establishing Himself upon the Throne] may also mean negating God's characterization by place. For [the Throne] is the highest place in the sight of people and the intellect cannot consider anything above it. So [by the verse] He points to the Throne to inform that He is sublime above all places and exalted above all needs. This is the case with the verse: “There is no secret speech of three, but He is their fourth...”<sup>409</sup> But the secret speech is something that is attributed to the telling of secrets, and not to the place. Therefore, He declared that He is sublime above all places and exalted above anything being hidden from Him. Then [He informed] of His power with the verse: “We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.”<sup>410</sup> In other words, [God is nearer] in terms of His sovereignty, power, and divinity over all the patches of the earth because they are places of worship by: “And He it is who in the heaven is God.”<sup>411</sup> He is the owner of everything from the following verse: “To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth.”<sup>412</sup> Then, His sublimity and majesty are by His statements: “He is the Omnipotent over His servants”,<sup>413</sup> “He is omniscient over all things”<sup>414</sup> and “He is omnipotent over all things”.<sup>415</sup> So, He gathered together in these words [i.e., “establishing Himself upon the Throne”] that which He separated in those, so that everything by which He is named and described is essentially His and not because of one of the creatures. Such is also the case with His glory, superiority and majesty. His praise is far exalted above similars, and there is no god other than Him.

Some have said: He meant by the “Throne” [His] kingdom, because the name is used for things that are high and above. For example, it is used for roofs and the tops of trees.

407 Q. 6:123.

408 Q. 17:16.

409 Q. 58:7.

410 Q. 50:16.

411 Q. 43:84.

412 Q. 25:2.

413 Q. 6:18.

414 Q. 6:101.

415 Q. 11:4.

iii) Three opinions have been expressed regarding the meaning of “establishing (*al-istiwā*)”:

a) Possession, as it is said: “So-and-so captured this region”, that is, he possessed (*istawlā*) it.

b) Ascending and rising, as He says: “When you and whoever is with you have climbed aboard the ark...”<sup>416</sup>

c) Maturation, as He says Most High: “And when he reached his full strength and matured.”<sup>417</sup> It has also been said that it means intending something. This is how some of the literati interpret His words: “Then He directed Himself to the heaven”, with the meaning of creating. This is by analogy with the action of creatures insofar as one of their actions follows another in intent, even if [God] is not said to have intent.<sup>418</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

iv) A poet said:

I believed that your throne (i.e., kingdom) cannot be destroyed or changed.

Another one said:

When the throne (i.e., kingdom) of the sons of Marwān was overthrown  
And perished like the tribes of 'Iyād and Ḥimyar.

Al-Nābigha said:

The thrones (i.e., kingdoms) perished after majesty.  
They collapsed after attaining peace and wealth.

Another said:

After the throne (i.e., kingdom) of Ibn Jafna and Ibn Māthil,  
Do your enemies hope for salvation?

v) Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: If [the term “*istiwā*”] is taken in the sense of possession, and the “Throne” in the sense of the kingdom, then God is the one who rules over all His creatures.

416 Q. 23:28.

417 Q. 28:14.

418 God does not have a time-bound intent that changes from moment to moment.



According to this figurative interpretation, the Throne borne [by the angels] (*al-mahmūl*) is different from this [kingdom]. The following verse refers to both things [i.e., both the kingdom and the Throne borne by the angels]: "He is Lord of the Tremendous Throne."<sup>419</sup> That is, He is the Lord of the supreme kingdom. This verse also affirms the existence of thrones other than it [i.e., the Tremendous Throne]. So that [i.e., the Tremendous Throne] may also refer to the throne that the angels carry and surround. *God alone leads to success.*

vi) As for [the senses of *istiwā'* meaning] maturation and ascending,<sup>420</sup> God Most High has said: "Say: 'Will you disbelieve in the one who created the earth in two days?'"<sup>421</sup> Continuing until: "Then He ordained them seven heavens."<sup>422</sup> [In these verses], He mentioned in detail the things He created in six days, whereas in another context He summarized them and said: "Lo! Your Lord is God who created the heavens and the earth in six Days, then He established Himself upon the Throne."<sup>423</sup> That which is meant [in the verse] by the creation of the heavens and the earth is the creation of beings who are to be tested. With [these beings], the kingdom attained maturity and reached its peak.<sup>424</sup> For they are the purpose of the creation of [the heavens and the earth]. Thus, the meaning of the kingdom was completed with [the tested creatures] and when it reached the stage meant for them, the kingdom attained its zenith. It has been said that this relates to the creation of humanity specifically, according to His statement: "He it is who created for you all that is in the earth..."<sup>425</sup> His statement: "He has made of service to you the night and the day."<sup>426</sup> Also: "He has made of service to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth..."<sup>427</sup> Ibn 'Abbās (may God be pleased with them both) said: "Man was created on the seventh day, the kingdom was completed with him and it reached its zenith. This is because everything was

419 Q. 9:129.

420 Al-Māturīdī combines the two ideas, as well as that of the intent, in describing this interpretation.

421 Q. 41:9.

422 Q. 41:12.

423 Q. 7:54; Q. 10:3.

424 Lit. "ascended and rose".

425 Q. 2:29.

426 Q. 14:33.

427 Q. 45:13.

created for [humanity] who was created to worship God, and the jinn joined mankind in the following verse: "I created the jinn and mankind only that they might worship Me."<sup>428</sup> However, the human beings are what is intended because all of the things I have mentioned are put to their service and return to their benefit.<sup>429</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

6) Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: In our opinion, the principle in this matter is as follows: God Most High said, "Nothing is like Him",<sup>430</sup> and He negated from Himself a resemblance to His creatures. In fact, we have already clarified that He is exalted above similars in His actions and attributes. Therefore, it is necessary that the expression "The Merciful is established upon the Throne"<sup>431</sup> is interpreted as informed by the revelation. And He negates from it similarity to the creation according to what He appends to it, since revelation informs that [i.e., according to the principle "Nothing is like Him"].<sup>432</sup> This has been established in the intellect too.<sup>433</sup> However, we do not take any given interpretation [of the verse] as definitive due to the possibility of another one of the meanings that we have mentioned. Moreover, it may have a meaning that has not reached us, so long as it is not of similarity to creatures. We believe in that which God intends by it. Similarly, in every context in which the revelation is established, such as the vision of God and the like,<sup>434</sup> any similarity [to creatures] must be negated from Him and the meaning that He intends must be believed without verifying one meaning over another. *God alone leads to success.*

428 Q. 51:56.

429 Al-Māturīdī's main view is that the world has been put at the service of creatures tested with the worship of God (for instance, humans and jinn). A consequence of this is that being tested is essentially linked with the world being put at one's service. Another view that he considers is that the intention is humanity specifically. The jinn are known to be created to worship God, but this is based on scriptural information. See Q. 51:56.

430 Q. 42:11.

431 Q. 20:5.

432 This sentence is missing in K, 74, because it has been drawn from a marginal note on MS. 35r, which Topaloğlu and Aruči incorporated into their edition. It may have been presumed originally missed by the scribe due to the phrase *bihi al-tanzīl*, which concludes both sentences.

433 The negation of similarity in understanding the Throne is not just found within revelation in Q. 42:11 but is known on rational grounds too.

434 This is the next topic that al-Māturīdī covers.



i) The principle in this matter is that the listener is incapable of determining the matter [of *istiwā'*] based on an understanding of the creatures in existence. Since it must be believed that God is exalted above similars in essence and actions, it is impossible to understand the things related to Him in the meaning that is understood from others.

ii) Additionally, [one must] suspend judgment (*waqf*) on the meaning that the phrase ["He established Himself upon the Throne"] takes for creatures in one's knowledge of it before one hears it. God, exalted is He, is cognized in a way other than creatures are known before hearing that speech. Hence, taking a figurative meaning of what is understood from creatures is not possible, since its cause is the preceding knowledge of it.<sup>435</sup> This is due to the possibility that the meaning is already understood in the visible world from "upon", the "Throne", and "establishing Himself", which are of divergent meanings. Therefore, it is impermissible to interpret it in the worst way when there is the possibility to interpret it in a better way.

iii) One should add that God tests one with suspension of judgment in some matters. Such is the case with the qualities of the promise [of pleasures of Paradise] and the threat [of the punishment of Hell] and the disconnected letters [at the beginning of the Qur'anic chapters]. There are also other things a person is to believe that are from what one is tested through abstaining from a definite judgment on. *God knows best.*

7) Al-Ka'bī once said: It is impossible that a place contains God Mighty and Majestic, because He existed, and place did not. And it is impossible that a need for place occurs for Him since He created place and because He does not change. Then [al-Ka'bī] said: He is in every place in the sense that He knows and protects it, just as it is said: So-and-so is [involved] "in" construction of the house, that is, [involved] in his action.

Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: What [al-Ka'bī] said, that a place does not contain [God], because He existed and place did not, is a reality. This is because [entering into a place] is change. However,

435 The rationale for suspending judgment on the phrase, "He established Himself upon the Throne" is that before one encounters it in revelation it is already known as it applies to creatures. Yet God is known differently from creatures (for instance, He is understood through contrastive arguments).



[al-Ka'bi's] opponent [i.e al-Māturīdī himself] does not say that God needs [a place], so the clarification rebutting this is a mistake.

8) Moreover, al-Ka'bi argues that [God] was not a creator, a giver of mercy, and a speaker, then He became one after He was not. [Thus], he establishes change [in God]. Yet change in place is less [than this], since one arrives at a place where he was not before without any change in himself. Such is the case with one who enters a place that surrounds him. On the other hand, it is impossible in the visible world that a change [of action] occurs without a change in the entity<sup>436</sup> of the agent. If [al-Ka'bi] considers this impossible about place, then it is all the more impossible about action because in the latter case change is more intense. In addition, no one in the visible world becomes an agent without displaying a change, but it is possible for one to be in a place, which is that in which creatures are located, without any change. Therefore, change in action is more intense.<sup>437</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

i) Then, one should be surprised at His words: "[God] is in every place in the sense that He knows [the place]." "Knowing" is an essential name of [God] and according to [al-Ka'bi] He in His essence is not in a place. In order for God to reach the place where [al-Ka'bi] said He is located; no knowledge is realized for Him. Reflect carefully to understand the contradiction in his statement.<sup>438</sup> Then, he sometimes claims that [God] protects [the place] and other times argues that He acts [in] it; and that His protection and action in places is not different from places.<sup>439</sup> Thus, his statement

436 Reading *dhāt* as entity not essence, as accidental features that are not part of the essence change.

437 Al-Māturīdī criticizes al-Ka'bi for arguing that God is not in a place and does not change, even though he agrees with both positions. The reason for this is that he contends that al-Ka'bi's view on the temporality of divine actions amounts to a change in God. Drawing an inference from the visible world, he argues *a fortiori* that a change in place is less intense for an agent than a change in action, which is premised on a change in themselves. Therefore, al-Ka'bi should be able to accept a change in place before adopting his view on divine actions.

438 The idea here seems to be that al-Ka'bi claims that God is omnipresent due to knowing, but that knowing is an essential property of God who he holds to be without a location. Moreover, as God is essentially knowing, He does not realize any knowledge from the creation of the places that He knows. The result is that applying omnipresence to God is incoherent.

439 This is because of al-Ka'bi's construal of divine action as creatures rather than essential attributes.



boils down to the following: "God is in every place, in places", which is nonsensical.<sup>440</sup> On the contrary, He knows all places before and after their generation. *God alone leads to success.*

ii) The Jurist Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: As for raising the hands to the sky [in prayer], it is for the purpose of worship. His servants worship as He wills, and He turns them in any direction He wishes. One who thinks that vision is lifted towards the sky because God is in that direction is like one who thinks that He is in a direction beneath the earth because he places his face upon it in prayer and similar situations; or, he is like one who thinks that He is in the east and west of the earth because he turns to the east and west of the earth in prayer; or, in the direction of Mecca because he sets out towards Mecca for hajj, and the walking between [al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa] (*al-sa'y*) in the ritual site is like seeking [God as] a lost animal;<sup>441</sup> or, in enemy territory, and they direct themselves towards one [i.e., God] who is overwhelmed by a superior force to save Him from it.<sup>442</sup> God is far exalted above that. Since one direction is not nearer to Him than another, and it is not more rightful that He is known from any direction, and the creatures have no capacity to reach Him only from one direction (and doing so for what is essentially knowing is not desired by intellects), then [know that] God, exalted is He, is free from the need for creatures to worship Him [let alone facing in a specific direction]. Thus, He made them worship for their own selves, so that they could be grateful for the blessings He had given them. He tests [His servants] as He wishes. Reaching Him from one direction rather than another comes to the imagination of those who do not know Him properly.

440 It is possible al-Māturīdī intends something like the following. If it is held that "God is in every place" but being "in places" is the same as the places themselves due to His creation of them, then the result is that "God is every place", which is incoherent.

441 The pilgrim goes back and forth, facing in first one direction, then the other. Hence, if the direction is linked to God, it can be compared to searching for a lost animal, which is not befitting for divine majesty. Recall here that the founding story for the *sa'y* is Hajar's search for water.

442 Reading MS. 36r as *yastanqidhu* with TA, 139. Or: "expending everything that they have", reading it as *yastanfidu* with K, 76. Fighting in God's path in the direction of the enemy is also a form of worship. Here, if it is literally understood as "fighting for God", it leads to an inappropriate meaning.

iii) In previous pages, we have explained what His nearness means. It is responding [to prayers] as clarified by the following verse: "And when My servants question you concerning Me, then surely I am nigh..."<sup>443</sup> Again, [His nearness] is help and support: "God is with those who keep their duty unto Him and those who are doers of good."<sup>444</sup> It is about approaching a station and status, as in the following verse: "But prostrate yourself, and draw near (unto God)."<sup>445</sup> It has also been narrated as follows: "Whoever approaches Me by one hand span, I will approach him by one cubit..."<sup>446</sup> and on. Also His statement: "Seek the way of approach unto Him."<sup>447</sup> Again, [the nearness of God is manifested] in His care and protection, as in His words: "Your Lord is watchful over all things";<sup>448</sup> "Your Lord watches over all things";<sup>449</sup> and "Who is the one aware of the deserts of every soul?"<sup>450</sup> His nearness is in terms of knowledge: "He knows both your secret and your utterance."<sup>451</sup> And other than that.

iv) The actions such as "to come", "to go" and "to sit", [which are attributed to God in the verses], should also be interpreted according to one of these meanings. Additionally, movement is understood from the coming of bodies, whereas manifestation is understood from the coming of the truth. This is the case with the verse "Say: the truth has come."<sup>452</sup> Accordingly, the going away of falsehood is its abolition, and the going away of the bodily object is its movement. This is the place of coming and going of accidents and bodily objects according to linguistic convention. God is exalted above both of these meanings altogether [i.e., bodily coming and going], so it is impossible to understand this from that which is ascribed to Him. *Strength comes from God alone.*

443 Q. 2:186.

444 Q. 16:128.

445 Q. 96:19.

446 This hadith can be found in al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, al-Tawhīd, 15, 20; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, al-Dhikr, 20, 21, 22, al-Tawba, 1.

447 Q. 5:35.

448 Q. 34:21.

449 Q. 39:62.

450 Q. 13:33.

451 Q. 6:3.

452 Q. 17:81.



We can also formulate the matter as follows. There are countless blessings that God bestows on His servants in every direction and situation. Therefore, as God the Almighty bestowed blessings on His servants in that direction and situation with respect to their organs and wealth, He charged them with worshiping in them both. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Finally, since the heaven is the place of the descent of revelation and the source of the blessings of the world, the eyes are turned to it [during prayer and expectation]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

## 2.17. Enquiry: [The Beatific Vision]

Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Belief that the Lord, Mighty and Majestic, will be seen without "perception" (*al-idrāk*)<sup>453</sup> and "interpretation" (*al-tafsīr*) is necessary and true for us. The evidence for the Beatific vision [is as follows]:

1) His statement, Most High: "Vision does not perceive Him, but He perceives (all) vision."<sup>454</sup> If [God] could not be seen, there would be no wisdom in negating perception, as those other than Him can only be perceived by seeing. Therefore, in a context in which creatures can only be perceived by seeing, it would be meaningless to negate perception.<sup>455</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

2) The statement of Moses (upon him be peace): "My Lord! Show me (Yourself) that I may gaze upon You..."<sup>456</sup> If it were impossible that God be seen, [this request] from him would indicate ignorance of His Lord. One who is ignorant of [God] cannot be a repository for His message, a trustee of His revelation.

453 This refers to the impossibility that God be perceived (lit. "reached") in sight; in other words, seen in a direction, at a distance and with a boundary, which is the case for all bodies. See the discussion below.

454 Q. 6:103.

455 For the statement, "Vision does not perceive Him" to be meaningful, He must be visible in a way that does not involve perception. Otherwise, He would say that He cannot be seen. To give an example, a thing cannot be called immovable unless it has weight. So, what is meant by "immovable" is not that an object has no weight, but that it is very heavy (*Translator*).

456 Q. 7:143.

Moreover, God Most High did not forbid [Moses] and did not cut off his hope [to see God], whereas for lesser things He forbade Noah, and rebuked Adam and other messengers.<sup>457</sup> Were this [demand of Moses] not permissible, it would amount to disbelief.

Then [God] said: "[But gaze upon the mountain!] If it stands still in its place, then you will see Me."<sup>458</sup> If it is said: "[Moses] might have been asking for a sign by which he would know [that God exists]." It is answered: This is impossible for many reasons.

i) One of them is that [God] says, "You will not see Me",<sup>459</sup> and has made him see a sign.<sup>460</sup>

ii) In addition, demanding signs is a behavior of obstinacy; and He had already shown signs [to Moses]. Also, this is the obstinacy of the disbelievers: even though sufficient signs are shown, disbelievers constantly ask for more. [If one says that Moses demanded a sign], that is a similar situation.

iii) Also, [God] says: "If it stands still in its place, then you will see Me."<sup>461</sup> The sign in which the mountain stands still in its place is different from the one in which it does not. Thus, it is established that [Moses] did not intend a sign by it.<sup>462</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

3) Another [piece of evidence] is Abraham's argument with His people about the stars and His words about setting and disappearing. He did not argue with his people by saying that he does not like a visible Lord, but by saying that he does not like a setting Lord. This is because [setting] is evidence of the lack of permanence. *Strength comes from God alone.*

457 This refers to the response of God to Noah crying out about his son lost in the Flood (Q. 11:46), and to Adam (and Eve) after eating from the forbidden tree (Q. 7:22).

458 Q. 7:143.

459 Q. 7:143.

460 The idea is that by making Moses see a sign instead of seeing God, the focus is on the vision of the divine, not His existence, which is never in question.

461 Q. 7:143.

462 Al-Māturīdī points out that the possible sign by which Moses sees God after His disclosure to the mountain is different from the actual occurrence in which he did not see God. As God set the relevant conditions, it is clear that Moses' initial request was not intended as a sign.



4) Another evidence is His words, Most High: "That day faces will be radiant, gazing at their Lord."<sup>463</sup> It is impossible for the word "gazing" (*nāẓira*) in the verse to mean "waiting" for the following reasons:<sup>464</sup>

i) The Hereafter is not the time for waiting, that is only this world. [The Hereafter] is the abode of realization and existence, except for a time of fear.<sup>465</sup> It has also been said [about the verse] that [believers] will witness in themselves the reality of the realization [of seeing God].

ii) Another reason is His words: "That day faces will be radiant."<sup>466</sup> This is the realization of reward [so they cannot still be waiting for it].

iii) Also, His words: "Gazing at their Lord." The particle "at" (*ilā*) is used for gazing at something, not [with the verb] for waiting.

iv) Believing [that God will be seen] has the meaning of good news and glorifying the achievement of blessings, whereas waiting is not one of them. In addition, to interpret [the vision of God] away from the literal meaning is a judgment against God. Thus, one must believe in gazing at God, just as He says, by negating all the meanings of similarity from Him, exalted is He. Just as what is ascribed to Him of speech, action, power and will, it is necessary to describe Him by negating all the meanings of similarity. The same is true for belief in [His] isness. Therefore, one who claims that God Most High cannot bestow upon anyone the Beatific vision, only considers by vision that which is understood from creatures. Just as one must not reject the statement of "The Merciful is established upon the Throne", and other verses, one must not reject them by presenting the meaning understood from creatures. On the contrary, they are affirmed through rejecting similarity, hence the same is true for the report of the Beatific vision. *God alone leads to success.*

463 Q. 75:22-23.

464 The rejection of this meaning responds to a common Mu'tazili interpretation of the verses. See al-Jushamī, *Al-Tahdīb fi al-tafsīr*, 10:7188.

465 That is, believers will not have radiant faces waiting for their Lord, as they will have the full realization of the divine presence in Paradise. This may, however, be preceded by fear on the Day of Judgment. Al-Bazdawī remarks, quoting earlier authorities: "Some of the *ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā'a* say: The Muslims and the disbelievers will see Him altogether, but a seeing of confirmation and awe, not a seeing of ennoblement." Al-Bazdawī, "Uṣūl al-dīn," 77.

466 Q. 75:22-23.

5) Another [evidence that God will be seen] is His statement Most High, "For those who do good is the best [reward] and more."<sup>467</sup> In more than [one] report it is transmitted [that the "more" (*ziyāda*) in the verse] is gazing at God.<sup>468</sup> Interpreting otherwise is also possible within the exegetical literature. However, were not belief in the Beatific vision an apparent matter, it would not be possible to turn away from and leave the apparent through these reports.<sup>469</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

6) Again, as has arrived in many reports, the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: "On the Day of Judgment, you will see your Lord as you see the Moon, and you will not hinder each other [in seeing it]."<sup>470</sup> When [the Prophet] was asked, "Have you seen your Lord?" He replied, "With my heart."<sup>471</sup> [The Prophet] did not say to the questioner that his question was improper. Also, the questioner already knew that the heart's vision is knowledge and that [the Prophet] knew God, so this was not what He was asking about. On the other hand, God Mighty and Majestic forbade the believers from asking questions about matters from which they were to refrain with the following verse: "O you who believe! Ask not of things [which, if they were disclosed to you, would trouble you]"<sup>472</sup> So, how is it permissible for a living thing to inquire about such a [subject]? In fact, for one group, this [inquiring about the vision of God] is disbelief.<sup>473</sup> But [the Prophet] did not forbid them [to inquire about it], nor did he scold them for it. On the contrary, he spoke to them about it gently and suggested that it was not something unheard of previously.<sup>474</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

<sup>467</sup> Q. 10:26.

<sup>468</sup> See Jarrar (ed.), *A Critical Edition of Kitāb al-Sawād al-A'zam by al-Hakīm al-Samarqandī*, 133.

<sup>469</sup> That is, were the Beatific vision not already established, it would not be possible for the reports to divert the apparent meaning of "more" towards it.

<sup>470</sup> See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *al-Tawhīd*, 24; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *al-Īmān*, 81. In other words, people will all be able to see God without having to stand next to each other.

<sup>471</sup> This also can be taken to refer to Q. 53:11: "The heart lied not in what it saw". Al-Māturidī reserves the Beatific vision for the Hereafter, interpreting the verses and reports that may refer to the events of the Night Journey and Heavenly Ascension, as not implying sight with the eyes. See al-Māturidī, *Ta'wīlāt al-qur'ān*, 14:195-96.

<sup>472</sup> Q. 5:101.

<sup>473</sup> This is likely a reference to the Mu'tazila who reject the doctrine of the Beatific vision.

<sup>474</sup> Reading *bi-badī'* with MS. 38r and K, 80, rather than *bi-ba'id* with TA, 144.



7) In addition, God Most High has promised that He will reward the believers with better than the deeds performed in this world.<sup>475</sup> Nothing is better than monotheism and nothing is more valuable than believing in it as it is what is most beautiful to the intellect. The goodness of the reward promised from the substance of Paradise is the goodness of bodily nature, and that is less than the goodness of the intellect. For it is not possible that something good with respect to the intellect is not found beautiful to the intelligent. Yet it is possible that there is a nature, such as the nature of angels, that dislikes a thing that the bodily nature considers good. The same applies to punishment. Therefore, the doctrine of the Beatific vision is required so that there is a value that reaches the honor granted to [the believers] in terms of loftiness. And [this value] is that the one they have worshipped unseen becomes visible for them, just as the reward they have sought becomes present for them.<sup>476</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

8) All [believers] will be gathered in the Hereafter with knowledge of God that doubts<sup>477</sup> cannot reach. This is the knowledge of sensation and not that of inference. A plurality of signs does not realize the knowledge of the truth that [doubts] cannot reach. The evidence for this is His words: "And though We should send down the angels unto them..."<sup>478</sup> In addition, what is mentioned about the disbelievers seeking help in denying the Hereafter and rejecting the prophets, and their saying: "We only tarried but an hour of the day"<sup>479</sup> and more [are evidence for the inadequacy of inference]. Since it is impossible for the knowledge of the senses to be like the knowledge of inference [i.e., in signifying what is not present], it is also impossible for the knowledge of inference to be like the knowledge of

475 Q. 9:121.

476 This is a rational argument that relies on the Qur'anic promise that believers will be rewarded with better than their deeds. Al-Māturīdī points out that the best of deeds is monotheistic belief and that it is something that the intellect deems good. All the rewards of the "substance of Paradise", that is the heavenly spouses, castles, food and wealth, are of a lower level of goodness, than that of bodily nature. This is because it is possible that a different kind of nature would not find such things good, but it is impossible that any (properly working) intellect would not find monotheism good. But this means that there must be a reward in Paradise that is better than any (created) substance of Paradise. This can only be the vision of God.

477 Lit. "devilish whispers" (*al-waswās*).

478 Q. 6:111.

479 Q. 10:45, 46:35.



the senses [i.e., in certainty]. Thus, it is established that the Beatific vision is necessitated [by] that [fact]. In addition, the disbeliever and the believer are equal in the knowledge of inference. The good news of the Beatific vision is specific for the believer.<sup>480</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

9) The Jurist Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: We do not say [that the Beatific vision will occur] with perception, due to His statement: "Vision does not perceive Him, but He perceives (all) vision."<sup>481</sup> He is praised by the negation of perception but not by the negation of vision. This is like the verse: "They cannot encompass Him in knowledge."<sup>482</sup> This verse requires Him to be known, but negates Him being encompassed. Similar is the case with perception. *God alone leads to success.*

In addition, perception means encompassing something bounded whereas God is exalted above the description of bounds, for it suggests ending and being lower than that which is higher. [God] is essentially one without bounds, which [i.e., the bounded] is the quality of one whose parts are contiguous until it terminates. Or [one can say]: [God] was and there was nothing to bound Him or by which He would be bounded. So, He is such without changing. Everything has its own bounds through which it is perceived. For instance, flavor, color, taste and smell, and so on are the bounds of the characteristics of things. God has determined for everything an aspect through which it is perceived and surrounded, even for intellects and accidents. Then, God has declared that He has no bounds and sides, which are edges<sup>483</sup> perceived by the means set for these sides. Vision and knowledge together rely on this understanding. *Strength comes from God alone.*

480 This has been read as a single argument, as also shown by the use of the closing formula, rather than as split up as found in TA, 145. The argument relies on the distinction between the knowledge of sensation and inference. In the world, God is known through inference, but this is not without the possibility of doubts. In the Hereafter, God will be known with certainty, and this requires a different mode of knowing than is possible in the world: sensation. Hence, the Beatific vision is a reality. Finally, whereas disbelievers and believers were both capable of making the inference to God, as required for the test of religious belief in the world, in the Hereafter seeing God is a unique reward for the believers.

481 Q. 6:103.

482 Q. 20:10.

483 Reading *ṭaraf* with K, 81, and what appears to be the case from MS. 38v, rather than *ṭuruq* (ways) in TA, 146. This is strengthened by the term reappearing in the next paragraph.



Also, the matter of vision falls under various aspects.<sup>484</sup> The reality of each of these aspects is only comprehended by knowledge of it. Hence, if [the aspect in question] is expressed as vision, it is interpreted in that respect. For a condition about which one is not sure, as it does not mention vision, it is necessary to suspend judgment as to its whatness when accepting its reality. As for perception, it designates knowing the bounds of a thing. For example, the shadow is seen in reality, but it is only perceived with the Sun [that is, its bounds are known through the sunlight]. Otherwise, [the shadow] is visible even when the sun has set, but it is perceived in vision only when the bounds for it becomes clear. Similarly, the light of daytime is visible, but its bounds are not known by itself. Darkness has a like nature because its edges cannot be seen, such that they are perceived and encompassed.<sup>485</sup> Even if something is seen without bounds, it can only be perceived through them. That is why there is a saying about the Moon: "One is neither sure of the bounds nor the extent of the Moon, such that it can be grasped and encompassed, yet it is seen with certainty."<sup>486</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

10) Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The principle in [the Beatific vision] is to believe what has arrived [in revelation], to negate all the meanings of creatures, and to avoid making any interpretations that did not come [from revelation]. *God alone leads to success.*

Then, al-Ka'bi has contended that vision is the same as perception. We have already explained [the relationship between the two]. Again, he claimed that the knowledge of the unseen does not occur outside the conditions<sup>487</sup> of knowing. Likewise, vision also takes place under the conditions of vision, which are as follows: there must be a certain distance between the subject and the object to be seen and the site in which it is located; [the subject and object] must face each other; air must reach [the eye]; the object

484 The word used is *wujūh*.

485 This extends the contrast between the concept of sight and perception, which is crucial to al-Māturīdī's treatment of the Beatific vision. These examples of light and darkness are cases in which a phenomenon is seen, yet not "perceived" when there is no way to see its edges.

486 This gives an additional force to the hadith that takes the Moon as an analogy for the Beatific vision. See 2.17 (6).

487 Al-Ka'bi uses the same word, *wujūh*, to mean "conditions".

must be not too small and not too distant. If vision could happen contrary to these conditions, it would be possible to know under them.

Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: al-Ka'bi made several mistakes in this section:

i) He took the eyesight of his own bodily substance as a criterion [for the vision of God]. However, it is known that there are substances other than his and that they see in aspects which al-Ka'bi is incapable of encompassing with his bodily substance let alone perceiving with his eyesight. For example, angels and jinn and more from those things that see us from where we cannot see them.<sup>488</sup> Even if we imagine the eyesight of small-bodied animals such as lice and mosquitoes, it is impossible to perceive it. The [recording] angel, who writes down all our actions and hears all of our words, also sees. If we try to measure [this sight] with reference to our own natural disposition, it becomes necessary to reject [the seeing of the recording angel], which is grave. Such is the case with what is narrated about the speech of the skin, the limbs, and other things which, was the matter of the visible world tested in the same way, it would be severe.

In the visible world, a distinction is made between two people's sense of sight in terms of vision and discernment, to the extent that they vary in degrees due to the obstacles that bar them. This is so much so that, were one of them to compare the state of the other with his own state, he would reject it. If there is [a difference even amongst the human individuals in terms of vision], it would be wrong to take his own vision as a criterion [for seeing God]. *God alone leads to success.*

ii) Again, in the visible world, only accident and body can be known through all the means of knowledge. Then, knowledge of the unseen came in modes different from these. The same is true of the Beatific vision. *God knows best.*

iii) What we have explained about seeing shadow, darkness, and light without any of the conditions necessary for vision.

488 This is an allusion to Q. 7:27: "[Satan] and his tribe see you from where you cannot see them".



iv) Despite the existence of all these conditions,<sup>489</sup> vision may fail to occur due to some obstacles or due to the substance itself. Thus, vision may occur without the existence of these conditions, too. This is similar to how we answer the one who claims that [God] is a body but not like [other bodies]. We counter him that [God] is active and knowing, such that the existence of these [properties] is valid without a body.<sup>490</sup> Likewise, we say that the Beatific vision [is not like the vision of other things].

v) The vision of someone other than us<sup>491</sup> can reach an extreme distance and smallness that would prevent us from seeing. Therefore, the loss of vision is due to an obstacle. When the obstacle is removed, vision becomes possible. *Strength comes from God alone.*

vi) [Al-Ka'bi's] doctrine takes the vision of bodily objects as a measure. However, he has not tested how the sense of sight sees except for bodily objects and accidents. Every bodily object [be it far or near, small or large] is visible; even though smallness and distance prevent one from seeing. When these two obstacles are removed from another's sight, such as the Angel of Death, he can see people as far as the ends and the middle of the earth. If this were to be considered for human sight, perception would be impossible. So, it is established that what [al-Ka'bi] takes as a criterion are not the means that explain vision, but the means that explain its obstruction.<sup>492</sup> Therefore, when the obstacle is removed, vision occurs. In addition, that which the vision thereof is essentially negated is an [individual] accident. Otherwise, every body is visible. Thus, if it is required to reject the vision of what is not a body or what cannot be seen (except by [the conditions] he mentions), then he must acknowledge it. For it is the accident that is essentially invisible, otherwise every entity [i.e., including God] is visible.<sup>493</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

489 Here al-Māturīdī uses *al-ma'ānī*, elsewhere determinant causes, for what has been translated as "conditions".

490 See 2.6.

491 Below it becomes clear al-Māturīdī is thinking of the Angel of Death who, despite being a created entity, needs powerful vision to carry out his function.

492 This refers back to the series of obstacles that al-Ka'bi discusses above.

493 The argument here is that al-Ka'bi's principle that only a body (under certain conditions) can be seen is unjustified. The correct principle is that only an accident (in and of itself) cannot be seen. This is because for essential reasons, accidents are only seen within the bodies that they characterize. One does not see an accident of "redness" in

[Al-Ka'bi opposes the view that God will be seen in the Hereafter] based on the fact that [He is not seen] in this world. The [vision of God in this world] is not impossible, but it drops the trial and lifts the obligation, yet the world is created for these two.<sup>494</sup>

11) Then, [al-Ka'bi] says in the matter of Moses' (upon him be peace) [request to see God] that it was [a desire] for knowledge encompassing signs [of God's existence]. We have already explained the falsity of this.<sup>495</sup> It is not the knowledge that he asked for. He is a messenger sent to people as a means for their salvation, and that is impossible without being tested. For [his sending] is to convey the message and to call to worship; it [the message, or the worship] is a test. On the contrary, Moses asked for the vision [of God] to be honored by it and to see his high position in His sight. Or [Moses wanted to see God] because He commanded him to let people know that [His vision] is possible.<sup>496</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

Another argument [of al-Ka'bi] is as follows: a being with intellect was not made to see, but rather a mountain, which lacks the intellect to know or see [God].

He is answered as follows: If [Moses asking to see God] was a sign, the mountain would not be able to see and understand it. So, were this the case, the sign would be the disintegration of the mountain, not that He would make it see the sign so that it would break up. This indicates that He showed Moses the sign, which was the disintegration of the mountain. However, God Most High says: "You will not see Me",<sup>497</sup> which [al-Ka'bi] interprets as [Moses not seeing] the sign [proving God's existence].

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its own right but sees that redness as it colors a particular body. See 2.1.3.1 (7). But if this is the case, then any other entity (he uses the word 'ayn, which includes God) can be seen, assuming any obstacles are removed.

494 In short, though seeing God in the world is a rational possibility, it would contravene divine wisdom. This is manifested in the trial of belief based on evidence that is not immune to doubt and the obligation to undergo difficulties now in the promise of a reward to come (as the greatest reward would already be granted).

495 See 2.17 (2).

496 It is not possible that Moses was asking for a proof of God's existence based on the preceding arguments, and the fact that it would invalidate the test for himself and his followers. Thus, al-Māturīdī suggests alternative reasons that Moses may have asked to see God.

497 Q 7:143.



But Moses did see [the sign; that is the disintegration of the mountain].  
*Strength comes from God alone.*

Then, [al-Ka'bi] asked himself the reason for Moses' repentance, though such is not inquired about. He claimed that [the reason for repentance] could be interpreted in two ways:

i) He knew that this [i.e., the request to see God] was a due to the evidence that God showed him, so he repented from it.

ii) As a custom, [pious] people renew [their repentance] in moments of fear even without any sin being committed.

Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: If the reason for Moses' repentance was a , it would be better for him [to repent immediately], rather than leaving it until he was informed by evidence. It would have been more appropriate to inform him [of the impossibility of seeing God] when he was conscious, not [just before] he was made unconscious. Also, [repentance] would be proper when [Moses] experienced fear, not when he had awoken and was feeling tranquil and secure.<sup>498</sup> The time he saw his stick moving [like a snake] so he turned and fled would be more appropriate [for his repentance].<sup>499</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

However, since God said to [Moses]: "You will not see Me", it may be that Moses had thought there was a possibility for the vision of God in the visible world and he could endure it due to God's promise to him with respect to the Hereafter. He abandoned this thought and believed in what He said: "You will not see Me", although this was initially part of his belief. This is similar to the fact that the believers believe in everything collectively, yet they believe anew in every single verse that is revealed and in every single obligation that is renewed. *God alone leads to success.*

498 This is based on Q. 7:143: "And when Moses came to Our appointed tryst and his Lord had spoken unto him, he said: My Lord! Show me (Your Self), that I may gaze upon You. He said: You will not see Me, but gaze upon the mountain! If it stand still in its place, then you will see Me. And when his Lord revealed (His) glory to the mountain He sent it crashing down. And Moses fell down senseless. And when he woke he said: Glory to You! I turn to You repentant, and I am the first of (true) believers."

499 See Q. 28:31.

12) We have already discussed [al-Ka'bi's] thoughts on His words, "That day faces will be radiant, gazing at their Lord."<sup>500</sup>

The Jurist Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The principle in speech is this: if [the speech] is about a subject that the addressee knows or the meaning is related to it, it departs from its literal meaning. But if it is not so, it does not. For example, there is His statement: "Have you not seen how your Lord spread the shade?"<sup>501</sup> and "Have you not seen how your Lord dealt [with the owners of the Elephant?]"<sup>502</sup> The principle of the matter is that saying: "I have seen such-and-such", or: "I have gazed at such-and-such" is not possible for other than [that person] himself. But by the statement: "I have seen him saying such-and-such and doing such-and-such", one does not [necessarily] intend by it the vision of [the person] himself. The same is true for Moses (upon him be peace) and the verse at issue.<sup>503</sup>

Then, anyone who reflects on the remarks by [al-Ka'bi] knows that he adopted the Mushabbiha doctrine because he failed to mention the determinant cause which required the vision to take place under those conditions; he only mentioned that it was observed to be that way. And that is the doctrine of the Mushabbiha whereupon every actor and every knower was observed to be a bodily object in the visible world. So, the same must be the case with the unseen. Then, [al-Ka'bi] mentioned the determinant cause of the vision of the corporeal but failed to mention the determinant cause of the vision of the incorporeal, such that it can become evidence.<sup>504</sup>

In addition, [al-Ka'bi] negated [the Beatific vision] due to the small and far away, as they are two causes that prevent vision. However, these two [obstacles] are ephemeral before God, exalted is He. Then, he contended

<sup>500</sup> Q. 75:22-23.

<sup>501</sup> Q. 25:45.

<sup>502</sup> Q. 105:1.

<sup>503</sup> A distinction is made between two cases. The first relates to the speaker or addressee's direct witnessing of something, whereas the second relates to their indirect witnessing and is open to a non-literal meaning. Hence, when Moses is told: "But gaze upon the mountain! If it stands still in its place, then you will see Me", it does not need to be taken in a literal sense.

<sup>504</sup> This refers to the paragraph above in which the idea that the Beatific vision means God is a body unlike other bodies is rejected. The Mushabbiha in question are the Karrāmīs, whom al-Ka'bi is said to have joined through his problematic definition, even though for him the result is rejecting the Beatific vision, rather than asserting a body for God.



by the glorification of God through His words: "Vision does not perceive Him, but He perceives (all) vision."<sup>505</sup> [Relying on this verse, al-Ka'bi] said that it is not possible [for this difficulty] to disappear [and therefore He could never be seen]. But [al-Ka'bi] has the like of it against him in His words: "The Creator of all things"<sup>506</sup> and "He is able to do all things."<sup>507</sup> [The fact that God, as described in these verses, has created everything, including the vision of Himself, and has power over everything] does not disappear. Therefore, God can be described as visible on the basis of dropping [the conditions] he mentioned.<sup>508</sup> Therefore, it has been established that such a path [i.e., a discussion within the framework of these conditions] cannot lead to the true nature of the Beatific vision.

So, if it is said: How will God be seen?

It is said: [He will be seen] without howness, because howness obtains for a thing with a form. On the contrary, [God] will be seen without [any of the following] attributes: standing, sitting, leaning, suspension, connection, disconnection, facing forward, facing backwards, short, long, light, dark, static, moving, touching, separated, outside, inside, nor any meaning that the imagination may acquire, or the intellect may surmise due to His exaltation above them.<sup>509</sup>

## 2.18. Enquiry: [The Teaching of the Mu'tazila is the Result of Other Religions]<sup>510</sup>

The Jurist (may God have mercy on him) said: Let us mention some things that will indicate to the person of intellect the teaching of Mu'tazilism in [its] foundations and their similarity with the followers of other

505 Q. 6:103.

506 Q. 6:102.

507 Q. 11:4.

508 See the relevant paragraph above.

509 Denying howness from the Beatific vision means that there is no sight in the world that can provide knowledge of the vision of God. See 2.3 (3) ii.

510 The Arabic editions of *The Book of Monotheism* titled this section based on the thingness of non-existents, which is the first theological position discussed. But the opening remarks and the content of the section makes clear that the thingness of non-existents is just one example of a wider point, which is to suggest that Mu'tazilism has more in common with other religious and philosophical ideas, especially Zoroastrian Dualism and Dahrism, than Islam.

religions. Thus, anyone who reflects will know that their teaching is the result of the teaching of [other religions].

1) The Mu'tazila said: "The non-existent are things. The thingness of things is not through God. Rather, it is through God that they were brought into existence from non-existence."

Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: In that case, they are accused of considering things to be real from eternity. But things did not exist, they came into existence later. Regarding things as eternal negates monotheism. For [in that case] things did not follow non-existence. Thus, the [non-existent and the existent] differ [only] in manifestation and appearance. Otherwise, they are non-existent things in eternity. Hence, [the Mu'tazila] have accepted beings other than God in eternity, which abolishes monotheism.

This discourse of them also requires the eternity of the world because [all] things are other than God. The non-existent are eternal things other than Him. This leads to a conflict with all the adherents of monotheism over the world's creation *ex nihilo* by God Most High. In the opinion [of monotheists], creation consists of origination with the meaning of bringing into existence; otherwise, they would have already been things before they were created.<sup>511</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

2) The doctrine of a group of the Dahrīs that the Creator fashioned things in eternity and therefore things existed in eternity is closer to this doctrine of [the Mu'tazila than to the People of Monotheism.] Also, what [the Mu'tazila] say mandates agreement with the Dahrīs in their doctrine: "the primordial matter of the world is eternal." This also coincides with the argument of the followers of prime matter that the world emerged as a result of the origination of accidents. Likewise, [the Mu'tazila] make things in their thingness non-originated then they enter existence. Additionally, this [theory] requires that God was not a creator, nor an originator [in eternity]. Just as things came into existence after they did not exist, God, exalted is He, emerged with the creation of creatures after He was not an agent in Himself, or He became a creator after He was not one. *God alone leads to success.*

511 Here al-Māturīdī argues that the Mu'tazilī view on the thingness of non-existents implicates them in believing in an eternal world. This provides a reason to shift the discussion onto the question of divine creation and cosmology.



According to [the Mu'tazila], God was by Himself [in eternity], when neither the world nor any part of it existed. Then, the world came into existence without any cause from Him due to which it would exist. For, according to them, will and likewise existentiatio are the same as the world. So, the world came into existence without any cause from Him. Nevertheless, [the Mu'tazila] accepted [the world as] evidence for [the existence of God] by relying on the views that I have mentioned. Hence, they lie by considering the world as evidence [for the existence of God], while arguing, [in relation to the process of the creation of the world], that nothing originated from God but the coming into existence of the world. However, according to their teaching, knowing that something exists does not require it to have been existentiatioed, nor does eternity require it to exist through [the eternal]. For them, what is from God consists of these two [i.e., knowledge and eternity], neither of which necessitates the existence of [the world]. Therefore, they mandated that the world existed without either of them. This is the case according to the opinion of those who say that the world is eternal, for they say that the world exists without [a cause] outside itself. So, with this view, [the Mu'tazila] resembled the teaching of the [people] who said this. However, these [people] are more consistent because they considered the world to be eternal since it exists without [a cause] outside itself, whereas [the Mu'tazila] considered it temporal – from the point of view we have explained – without [a cause] outside itself.<sup>512</sup>

What is even more astounding is that [the Mu'tazila] regarded the world as creator and created itself, generator and generated itself. Thus, the world has become a world without the action of another. Then, [the world] enjoined upon itself all the good and bad names. If the world's name had been inverted it would have been more excused.<sup>513</sup> However, this is a sign of a bad end [i.e., for the Mu'tazila].

3) In addition, the Mu'tazila's position is similar to that of the Dualists on this matter. [According to the Mu'tazila], things did not exist, then

512 This paragraph is a recap of al-Māturīdī's critique of the Mu'tazila for not treating God's existentiatioing act as an essential attribute.

513 This appears to be a play on words. If the world has been made creator (according to al-Māturīdī's characterization of Mu'tazilī theology), such that it takes on all the good and bad names, it would have been better for the name "the world" (*ism al-'alam*) to be inverted to "the Knower" (*ism al-'ālim*).



they came into existence without there being the originating of another to extract them from non-existence.<sup>514</sup> The Dualists said: Light and darkness were separate, then they became mixed. This world [came into existence] without separating or mixing being due to another. Thus, the world became a world of its own after it was not one. For there was no one other than [light and darkness] to make it occur. The formulation of the Mu'tazila is akin to this, as we have said. *Strength comes from God alone.*

4) The Mu'tazila and others demonstrate the temporality of the world on the fact that it has never been devoid of temporally generated things. Their only evidence for this is the existence of the world. So, they consider it necessary that the world be temporal, saying that the world came into being through an originator. Then, the Mu'tazila said with respect to God, exalted is He: Once He was not a creator, merciful and gracious, yet now He [has these attributes]. Thus, [the Mu'tazila] have described [God] in His initial state [of action] according to the knowledge that has come to creatures of Him not being devoid of temporals. This is like the world which they observe through their senses as not being devoid of [temporals]. Therefore, the cause by which they know that the world came into existence from Him is that by which they know that the merciful creator is temporal! However, God is beginningless and eternal.<sup>515</sup>

Henceforth, there are two more aspects:

i) If one must say that the world as a whole is temporal – even if we cannot witness it – because we observe that the parts of it that are visible to us have never been devoid of the elements of temporal generation, then the same judgment should be applied to the Creator, because we observe some things in Him that would require us to call Him temporal.

514 This combines the Mu'tazili conception of the thingness of the non-existent with the criticism of their lack of origination. The result, al-Māturīdī holds, is that things are in a sense present in their non-existence and then emerge into existence autonomously. This becomes the basis for a comparison with the Dualist notion of the autonomous mixing of light and dark.

515 Al-Māturīdī here combines two of his existing arguments to attack the Mu'tazila. In the first one, he claims that they infer that the world is temporal as it can never exist in the absence of temporal things. This is a standard move in the cosmological argument. See Shihadeh, "Mereology in *Kalām*," 6-7. This is followed by their position that God's actions are temporal creations, which means that God, insofar as He acts, is also never devoid of temporalities. Thus, they are left in the awkward situation that the principle that leads to God's existence also leads to His temporality.



ii) Although the existence of God is known only through temporals, the eternity of His essence has become necessary. So, why is it not necessary to say that the whole of the world is eternal even though it has never been devoid of temporals?

In addition, we are aware of the possibility that there may exist temporals in the part of the world that is not perceived by the senses, on the basis of such characteristics ascribed [to the world] as joining, separation, movement and stillness. Hence, according to [the Mu'tazila] mercy, creation, origination and resurrection are attributed to [God], all of which are temporals according to them. Therefore, He must be given the same judgment as the world. Yet [we contend] one of this description must have a creator and originator outside of that. *Strength comes from God alone.*

5) The Mu'tazila said: God, exalted is He, was, then a "will" was generated from Him through which the world existed. However, [this will was generated] from Him without His creation, willing or choosing of it. For apart from that will, there is only the essence [of God], and the essence precedes the will. This is exactly the same as what the Zoroastrians said: There was God, exalted is He, then there originated a vile thought from which Satan was generated.<sup>516</sup> [Satan] is the one by which there is all evil. The Zoroastrians name it "thought", while the Mu'tazila name it "will" and "choice". The coming into being of will is not through will and choice, therefore it is something more like thought. [According to the Zoroastrians this thought] was the same as evil, and according to the Mu'tazila, the will was the same as the world. And this, God knows best, is the meaning of the Prophet's, peace and blessings be upon him, saying: "The Qadarīs [i.e., the Mu'tazila] are the Zoroastrians of this community."<sup>517</sup>

516 This is a reference to an alternative creation myth of Zoroastrianism. According to the interpretation of "Zurvanism", the god Zurvan experienced a "doubt", and this led to the figure of Ahriman who is responsible for evil in the world. See de Jong, "Zurvanism". The invocation of Satan is not just al-Māturīdī's translation of a foreign religious concept into an Islamic idiom but reflects the self-representation of Zoroastrians in his era in their dialectical contestation with Muslim theologians, as can be seen from the *Škand Gumānīg-Wizār*. Sahrer, *The Definitive Zoroastrian Critique of Islam*, 127-31.

517 This narration occurs in various Hadith collections. See Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan, al-Sunan*, 16; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 2:86; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan, al-Muqaddima*, 10; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Maqāṣid al-ḥasana*, 379; al-'Ajlūnī, *Kashf al-khafā'*, 2:91-92. The comparison between the "will" and the "thought" here is not strong. The Mu'tazilī concept of the



6) Then, [the Mu'tazila] maintain that the world has never been devoid of the states of joining and separation, annihilation and endurance. These states, on the other hand, may originate through someone other than God, just as is the case for the parts of ships, buildings, writing and other things are joined and separated [by someone other than God], and just as have been the travel of the Sun and the Moon, and the motion and stillness of creatures. The world consists of two kinds: accidents and bodies,<sup>518</sup> which is a whole that may exist through God and creatures.<sup>519</sup> Thus, the world is a whole that may exist through more than one [agent]. This is the same as what the Zindiqs<sup>520</sup> say [that the principle of the existence of the world] is two, while the Naturalists<sup>521</sup> and Star Worshippers<sup>522</sup> say that there are more than two.<sup>523</sup>

Then, in the opinion of [the Mu'tazila], God, majestic is His praise, did not produce any proof for His act of generation and eternity other than the world. Then, He did not distinguish between the accidents that were

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divine will cannot do evil, which is instead left for human agents. Hence it is quite different in conception from the "thought" that plays the role of Satan. If the aspect of natural generation of the "will" is being stressed, a better comparison would be with the Neoplatonic idea of emanation. The comparison given in the hadith uses the word Qadaris, which suggests a focus not on the cosmological ideas of the Mu'tazila but an earlier debate over free will. The hadith may have its origin in early anti-Qadari worries. See van Ess, *Zwischen Hadith und Theologie*, 147-48. The reason that the Qadaris are compared to the Zoroastrians in the hadith is likely due to the idea that by separating the human will from God, the Qadaris were engaging in a kind of dualism. This is a more plausible interpretation of the hadith than directly connecting it to the Mu'tazili doctrine of the generated will.

- 518 Reading "bodies" (*al-ajsām*) with MS. 42v and Kholeif, 89, rather than "atoms" (*al-jawāhir*) as emended by TA, 154.
- 519 MS. 42v, TA, 155 and K, 89, have an additional sentence here: "Thus, the world is a whole that may exist through God and creatures (*fa-kānā al-'ālam jumla yaḥtamilu al-kawn bi-llāh wa-bi-l-khalq*). This is a repetition of the previous sentence that has likely arisen as a scribal error due to the similarity of the following sentence: "Thus, the world is a whole..."
- 520 Zindiqs (*al-zanādiqa*) has a number of meanings, including "atheist" or "heretic". The context here makes it clear that Zoroastrian Dualists are intended.
- 521 The word is *aṣḥāb al-ṭabā'i'*.
- 522 Reading [*aṣḥāb*] *al-nujūm*. This may refer to the Sabians who were star worshippers from Harran.
- 523 The Naturalists held there to be four primary elements, and al-Māturīdī responds to this idea. See 4.1 (2). The Star Worshippers venerated seven visible objects that moved around in the sky: the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn.



produced by another and those that were produced by Himself. [The phenomena of] joining and annihilation, are sometimes present to the senses, but their joiner and mover is not visible. They may come about due to other than [God], not because of Him, even if [this other] is not seen, as this is equivalent to what is seen. This is like the doctrine of the Dualists and the Naturalists: Things are generated through them [that is, light or darkness, natures etc.], and this generation occurs without any of them setting up evidence to distinguish their own creation from that of the others, which is a sign of powerlessness. The meaning that God adduces as evidence that the entire world has been originated by Him is that He says: "Otherwise each god would have taken away what he had created."<sup>524</sup> However, for [the Mu'tazila], God Most High also did not take away His creations because He did not mark them with a sign [showing that they belonged to Himself].<sup>525</sup>

Then, if [on the view of the Mu'tazila] we imagine that subtle bodily objects are divided into parts that cannot be further divided, it will be impossible to perceive them through the senses and convey them to the mind. [These indivisible parts] may be combined by other than God in proportion to the thinness and thickness of the bodily substances. Thus, the evidences for God based on the perception of bodies may [in reality lead] to the action of another.<sup>526</sup> God Most High may have not explained to people

524 Q. 23:91.

525 Al-Māturīdī's complaint here is at first a repetition of the point that the Mu'tazila draw no link between God and the existence of the world. But then he moves to a new angle of attack. He accuses the Mu'tazila of inconsistency in attributing accidents, such as joining, to God. They allow for accidents to be produced by other than God but then it becomes impossible to know the limits to that process, which is inherently unstable. This is compared to Dualism and Naturalism in which there is competition between the fundamental materials. Then, he quotes Q. 23:91, which refers to a posited multiplicity of gods each taking away their own creation. Here, the Mu'tazila are said to not even have God take away His creatures, because they are in some respects autonomous. In other words, Mu'tazilism is a kind of mere conservatism that is inherently unstable in determining the causal role of God and creatures. Al-Māturīdī's own position is a concurrentism in which God without exception creates the causal powers by which things act. See 4.3, 6.3, 6.6 etc. Also, see Harvey and Jalajel, "Al-Māturīdī's Divine Action Model: A Distinctive Account of Causality" (forthcoming).

526 This seems the closest that al-Māturīdī comes to directly acknowledging Mu'tazili atomism with the phrase "parts that cannot be further divided" (*ajzā' mim mā lā yatajazza'*). Though the details are not that clear, he seems to have in mind that if there are building blocks to the world in this way, they may be liable for arrangement out-



to let them know that [the world] is His creation with evidence that will remove the possibility [of the world's origination] from another and will establish that it came into existence from Him according to their senses. So, what is the situation in the part of the world that is concealed from people?<sup>527</sup> Thus, God resembles [the principles] I have mentioned from the Dualists and others in that none of them makes evidence for his own action. This is because an evil may be good for someone.<sup>528</sup> The same holds true of substances such as warmth, coldness and to whatever else the natures refer. Likewise with the traveling stars. *Strength comes from God alone.*

7) Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The People of Monotheism provided evidence to negate the doctrine of the Dualists on the basis of two points:

i) First, each of the two principles [i.e., light and dark] hinders<sup>529</sup> the other from what it is going to do, and again, each of the two can do what the other does not know. If [the Dualists] accept this, they consider both or either of them ignorant. If they do not accept this, they will consider both of them impotent. Ignorance and impotence abolish lordship [of light and dark].

Second,<sup>530</sup> what one wants to bring into existence, the other wants to destroy, so they come into conflict. Thus, the existence of the world indicates the existence of the One [i.e., God].

Then, according to another teaching of the Mu'tazila, the servant has power over other than what God knows will happen because one who will be a disbeliever in His knowledge can be a believer. The reality of the [servant's belief] is that it leaves His knowledge, which necessitates for the servant the power to hide the act from God. Then, this approach [supposedly] does not negate

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side of divine creative activity, unlike his own more dynamic model of dispositional accidents. For example, the Mu'tazilī Mu'ammār (d. 215/830), an early atomist, proposed that the combining of atoms in various ways according to their length, breadth and depth leads by "natural necessity" to the creation of accidents. See Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām*, 139, n. 133.

527 An *a fortiori* argument. If even what is visible does not necessarily lead to a secure cosmological argument for God, that which is invisible cannot.

528 Hence it fails to demarcate its action as coming from either light or darkness.

529 Reading MS. 43r as *yasuddu* with K, 90.

530 This would initially seem to be the second "point" (*ḥarf*) that al-Māturīdī wants to raise. But he explicitly goes on to "the second point" (*al-ḥarf al-thānī*) below. It has, therefore, been treated as a second part of his first point.



His oneness. The same is true when there is another god! [I am telling you this] to let you know that the teaching of the Mu'tazila is in fact the teaching of the Dualists,<sup>531</sup> for what proves monotheism is what refutes both teachings.

ii) The second point is that [the Mu'tazila] attribute to the servant the power to negate all of God's governance of indirect action (*tawālud*)<sup>532</sup> and to repel His threat in His words: "I will fill Hell..."<sup>533</sup> They also affirm that the deeds of all disbelievers and demons take place other than the way that God wills them to happen. Rather, even if God wills their actions not to happen and spends everything in His treasury to prevent them; or even if He wills [the servant] to do more, He cannot. [While saying all of this, the Mu'tazila] do not consider it impossible to accept the existence of the Deity. He preserves creatures in existence according to what is in His knowledge. His creatures originate and exist according to the mode in His knowledge; and the same applies in the matter of the world. This clarifies what I have told you that the teaching of the Mu'tazila gives rise to the teaching of the Dahrīs and Zindīqs, and not People of Islam.

8) The teaching of the Dualists is that the world is the act of two [agents]. Neither has creation, governance or power over the other's deed, and each has an act of evil and goodness that the other is not capable of performing. Such is the teaching of the Zoroastrians.

According to the teaching of the Mu'tazila, the servant has the power to perform some kind of action, which is acquisition. The one worshipped [i.e., God] also has a kind of action, which is origination. God has no power or creation over the act of the servant, nor does the servant have power over the act of God. The governance of the world turns on these two things [acquisition and origination]. Through this, the Mu'tazila actually resemble those I have mentioned.

<sup>531</sup> Using *al-zanādiqa*.

<sup>532</sup> Indirect action according to the Mu'tazila refers to action (for instance, accidental motion) arising secondarily from either another indirect action or ultimately from a direct action. For example, if someone were to use a bat to hit a ball, moving one's hand while holding the bat, that would be direct action. The motion of the ball away from the bat would be indirect. Note that al-Māturīdī seems to accept the validity of the indirect action theory in 2.11 (4) and the existence of genuine causal powers within the creation. Yet, it is an inviolable principle for al-Māturīdī that everything other than God is created by Him.

<sup>533</sup> Q. 7:18.

The teaching of the Mu'tazila is even more repugnant [than the Dualists], because by relying on this teaching, they posit a power from [God] over the stillness and motion of the servant. When God renders the servant capable of movement and stillness, this power disappears from Himself. However, we do not see that the Dualists<sup>534</sup> deprive one of the two [agents] from power by rendering the other one powerful exclusively. Thus, the meaning of power existing in the agent to whom the Dualists attribute lordship is more worthy of self-subsistence than [the meaning of divine power] as understood by the Mu'tazila. And this means negating the power of self-subsistence from God, which is the most repugnant statement.

The second is the lie of [the Mu'tazila] because they acknowledge that the human action involves everything that they attribute to the Creator, but they fail to attribute the name of divinity through which God is known by means of the action of things, and likewise for the name "the Creator".

In addition, the Mu'tazila increase the degree of power possessed by the powerful servant above the power of God, because they say: "Although God is described by power, He has no power to do what He promises and to fulfill His act. For example, God assigns lifespans and sustenance to His servants. Then, a servant comes up and kills one of them before He has given him fully his term, fulfilled to him His promise, and while he still has power. God Most High cannot prevent this servant from this act that he is willing to accomplish, because He cannot hinder him from power. Thus, the power of the servant is greater, and his will is more effective." Majestic is our Lord and exalted above this description.<sup>535</sup>

The Dualists claim that light was bound and shackled by darkness while anxious to benefit and expel the evil [of darkness] from its own substance. According to those who start the beginning of the mixing from [darkness], such is the case with darkness. Thus, both [light and darkness] made mistakes. For the acts of both resulted in the opposite of what they wanted, and each of them strove to be free from the other. Hence, [the Dualists] were forced to say that light has error, ignorance and powerlessness. As for error, this is because its end was not as it wished it to be; as for

<sup>534</sup> Here: *thanawiyya*.

<sup>535</sup> See 6.9.



ignorance, this is because it did not know that it would be shackled by its enemy; and as for powerlessness, this is because although it has striven to be free and govern itself, it failed to do so.

The Mu'tazila also speak similarly: God has not given power to the disbeliever or to anyone else except to obey Him; He has not made anyone an owner of property except to give thanks to Him; He has not created anyone except to submit to Him. That is what He wants, and that is what He did. If anything different than this had come from him, He would have been foolish and unjust. Then, with all that He gave to His enemies, what He wanted did not occur. He has errors, of which the most well-known is that matters do not happen as He wants. Hence, the servant has power over [the deed] that would fall outside the knowledge of God were he to perform it. Thereupon, [God] did not later affirm about the act that it was [His] action, such that He could prevent it.<sup>536</sup> Thus, this doctrine of [the Mu'tazila] necessitated the resemblance to whom I mentioned [i.e., the Dualists] in all blameworthy respects.

9) Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The Zindiqs rejected the idea that something could come into existence from nothing because it is impossible to imagine such a thing.<sup>537</sup> When saying that God is a body, the Mushabbihā relied upon the same argument.

The Mu'tazila also deny the creation of the deeds of the servants because such thing is not established in intellects and not imagined by imaginations. The Qadarīs [i.e., the Mu'tazila] claim that God does not avoid doing the good objective over which He has power. The Dualists also say that God acts on the good objective and that the creator of evil is another. Likewise, the Qadarīs say that God has no power any evil thing that exists, and all [evils] are the deeds of the servants.

The Mu'tazila say: God does not will that evil happens to anyone nor arise from anyone, contrary to Satan. Then, evil occurs, even though it is not what God wills. Likewise, the Zindiqs say that although God does not will evil, it originates from Satan, and from the creator of evil [i.e., darkness]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

536 Reading according to MS. 44r: *thumma mā thabata min al-fi'l fīmā ba'du huwa fi'l allāh fi al-man' minhu.*

537 See 2.5.1.

## 2.19. Enquiry: [Qualifying and Naming God Does Not Require Similarity]

1) Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: A group denied the essential attribute by which God is characterized or the essential name through which He is known, thinking that these [attributes and names] would require similarity [between Him and creatures,] because in this case, He would have a name like other than Him. They said: Since it is impossible that there is for Him a correspondence with anything from amongst creatures by indicating to it, the proof for there [not] being a correspondence with the name given to everything is more appropriate.<sup>538</sup> For this reason, they rejected that He could be named "thing", "knowing" and "powerful", arguing that this is like saying that He has a place and is in a place, for place likens Him to creatures and limits Him. The notion that He is in all places is [subject to the same judgment], because places have an end. Therefore, it is the same to describe Him by being in many places or by being in one of them. Similar is the case with [ascribing essential attributes and names to Him].<sup>539</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

i) The principle is that, according to us, God has essential names, such as His words: "God...the Most Gracious",<sup>540</sup> and He has essential attributes by which He is described, such as knowledge of things and power over them. However, the act of describing Him is from us. The name necessarily is only according to what lies within our means and our expressions reach, as the way to this is only through what is known in the visible world. This necessitates similarity in words, because [the name] is assessed on the basis of what is known in the visible world. However, necessity has led us to negate the meaning understood from the visible world in order to negate the similarity, though we must name Him by what I have mentioned. If we could name Him by something by which no one else has been named, we would do that. But since the visible world is His evidence and that through

<sup>538</sup> In other words, the opponent's argument is that if a particular name cannot be used to refer to God, then *a fortiori* that is even more the case for general names.

<sup>539</sup> The interlocutor makes use of al-Māturīdī's rejection of place for God, arguing that essential attributes mandate similarity and limits in the same way.

<sup>540</sup> This may be a reference to Q. 17:110: "Say, 'Call upon God or call upon the Most Merciful, whatever names you call, the best names are for Him...'"



which He needs to be known, His name is assessed from it in a way that brings [the meaning] that He intends closer to the mind, even though He is exalted above having a similar or a likeness. Do you not see that the expression by which we name God knowing and powerful varies between languages, yet this does not make a difference? This shows you that the names by which we name God are expressions that bring [the meaning] closer to the understanding, not that they are literally His names. Since the hearts have derived some meanings from [these names] above which God is exalted, a phrase of negation has been connected to the naming. Thus monotheism, as I have explained, becomes affirmation of an essence through negation and negation through affirmation. *God alone leads to success.*

ii) The evidence for what we have said is the citing of [His names] by the messengers and holy books. If naming God by the names reported by the messengers required likening [God to creatures], they would be the cause for rejecting monotheism. However, they all called to worship the One and to recognize the oneness of the Creator. Therefore, it is impossible [for the messengers] to affirm a multiplicity [of gods] and to accept a correspondence [between] God and creatures. *Strength comes from God alone.*

However, since there is a possibility that one [i.e., God] who is named by these names may be an exception<sup>541</sup> to others who are known to have been named by them, it has been appropriate for [the messengers] to present [such names] along with [God's] statement: "Nothing is like Him."<sup>542</sup> Thus, the thingness of things in relation to [God] will be negated from the basic foundations [of being], which are accidents and qualities, and compound substances, that is, bodies.<sup>543</sup> *Help is from God alone.*

iii) Then, we observe that all parts of the world that can be perceived by the senses are compelled and incapable of self-governance and unaware of the beginning of their state. Also [they are ignorant] in every state of the extent in time and space through which the contraries that by their very nature repel each other, fluctuate and join together. Thus, it is understood that the world did not originate by itself, and that the one who governs and determines the world has knowledge and power over it. For [the world]

541 Reading 'an, rather than 'alā, along with MS. 45r and K, 94.

542 Q. 42:11.

543 See under 2.1.2 (4) and 2.1.3.2 (4).

originated without the possibility of harmony due to its own essence; and [it originated] without an indication of the power for it from its own self, and the knowledge of its state. Thus, it is necessary to verify the existence of the cause [i.e., God's knowledge and power] whose evidence is in the visible world, because there is no way to know [that cause] except this. Similarly, were this to occur by the governance of one who is under Him, then the first matter [i.e., of compulsion and incapacity] will return to it.<sup>544</sup> All this requires what we have mentioned.

2) The Bāṭinīs<sup>545</sup> have interpreted what has been mentioned of the names [of God] as the First Originated Being and the Second Originated Being, that is, the Intellect and the Soul. They make the entire world appear in the Intellect, the Soul derives from it and emanates prime matter. They say: "The Intellect was originated, such that origination was its cause, and everything that would exist appeared in it."<sup>546</sup>

It is impossible for one to make [something] appear through origination when he does not know what will happen or has no power or will to make it appear. Therefore, origination emanates from him unconsciously, without him knowing it and having power over it, just as a natural process occurs. In this case, God Most High, according to [the Bāṭinīs] is at the limits of nullity:<sup>547</sup> His attributes and names are negated from Him due to the fear of similarity, nothing functions as evidence for Him, and one can only speak of Him by imitation, which is impossible. *God alone leads to success.*

i) It is also said: Is "God" His name or another's name? Thus, one reaches the conclusion that this is the name of the Intellect, and "the Most Gracious" is the name of the Soul. Their teaching relies on this. They avoid the name for fear of likening God [to creatures], yet then make the one worshipped into the name of the Deity, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, and others that cannot be enumerated and parts that are difficult to count. So, according to them, the messengers did not introduce monotheism, but polytheism. *God is the only one from whom help is sought.*

544 Anything that is under God will suffer from the same kind of incapacity and can ultimately be used to argue for God and His attributes.

545 This is another name for the Ismā'īlīs referred to as Qarmatians under 2.14 (5) iii.

546 See Madelung, "Cosmogony and Cosmology vi. In Isma'ilism."

547 The word used is *al-ta'ṭīl*, the "stripping" of attributes from God.



ii) Then, if [the Bāṭinīs] say, "[God] has no name," they are asked: What do you mean by your sentence, "[God] has no essential name nor attribute"? They cannot find a way to express themselves by saying, "He has no name" and their statement, "God has no essential name" loses its validity. Then, they claim that [God] has a name from another, such as the Originated Being due to the origination that was a cause of originated being; He is the creator of the cause and neither the effect nor the cause. For every effect may act as a cause in some cases.

Since he attributes a name to [God] from another, [the Bāṭinī] is asked: Is that name ascribed to Him from another the truth for Him, or does He name [Himself]? If he says, "No", then he can name Himself whatever He wants, be it from others, cause or effect. [That name] from another was appropriate for Him, because likewise [the Bāṭinī] says: "He was, and there was no cause nor effect." Hence, this is necessarily a metaphorical rather than literal naming. So, another obligates this name for Him without anything having come from Him requiring it.

If [the Bāṭinī] says: Origination came from Him. It is said: Origination came from Him after it did not exist. Thus, in what aspect was the name [i.e., First Originated Being] realized for Him such that it became required? He must have made it through origination, and this will continue *ad infinitum*, which is impossible, and He cannot accept. Therefore, there must be essential origination, so that He is an originator in eternity. This means that the essential name is necessary for Him.<sup>548</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

iii) Shaykh Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Then, the principle according to us is the following. The unrestricted name [i.e., knowing] does not realize similarity, because in the visible world all contraries come under a name, such as life and death, light and darkness, evil and goodness, disbelief and belief. Everything has a distinct name. If similarity occurred due to the unrestricted name, then no mutual opposition would be known, and there would be no difference between the names. [Hence,] it has been established that [the names], according to their difference and agreement, are that which the reality of [things] would not be

548 Positing a temporal act of origination for God leads to a regress and hence to the need for an eternal act of origination.

known were it not for [them]. If similarity obtained in the visible world by the correspondence of the name with the negation of a meaning that is intelligible, then the world would not be named celestial and nether, and First and Second Originated Being. There is between those who claim that He has a name [i.e., al-Māturīdī himself] and between other than him [i.e., the Bāṭinī] a correspondence in negating the [divine] name from all [created] things. [This is] because he finds in the phrase, "One of the creatures" a negation of similarity, even if there is aggregation in terms of the name of "the ones".

Then, according to [the Bāṭinī], origination is a cause and is not described as a "thing" because things [originate] through it. [But] neither are all accidents described as knowing, powerful and so on [because they are the determinant causes by which these properties are manifest]. So, were there similarity in affirmation of the name, then it would also be in its negation due to the aspect I have mentioned. *Strength comes from God alone.*



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Chapter Three

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Enquiries of Divine Wisdom

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### [3.1. Answers to the Question "Why Did God Create the Creation?"]

*In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful*<sup>549</sup>

Praise is due to God for whom the gratitude and praise that He deserves are unlimited due to the abundance of blessings and the greatness of benefits He has bestowed upon us. We ask Him to make us successful in entering the best-guided path of salvation.

Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: People differed in answering the question: "Why did God create the creation?"

1) One group said: This question is false; [God] cannot be asked about that. God, exalted is He, is eternally wise, omniscient and self-subsistent. So, it is impossible for His act to leave wisdom, because an act either leaves [wisdom] due to ignorance about it, or because of fear of losing benefit if the path of wisdom is preserved. However, God, exalted is He, is not ignorant, but omniscient and self-subsistent, such that no state of need touches Him the elimination of which He will benefit from. He has negated His act from leaving the direction of wisdom, and there is no wisdom in asking, "Why?" Therefore, God Mighty and Majestic has negated the delusion of futility from His actions saying: "We created not the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, in vain",<sup>550</sup> until the following verse: "He will not be questioned as to that which He does, but they will be questioned."<sup>551</sup> [Hence,] He ascribes woe to whoever thinks that God is needy or His act involves folly.<sup>552</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

<sup>549</sup> This is the second *basmala* in the book after its start. It may reflect the compositional process by which al-Māturīdī brought together his summa from disparate written materials. There is some repetition in the topics that follow from earlier sections in the book, which could indicate that the parts were initially written separately, even if part of an overarching plan. See Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 215-16.

<sup>550</sup> Q. 21:15.

<sup>551</sup> Q. 21:23.

<sup>552</sup> He is likely alluding to Q. 21:18: "And yours will be woe for that which you ascribe (unto Him)".



2) A group of Mu'tazila said: God has seen what is most beneficial and has acted as such. He is not asked about His most beneficial deed.

Shaykh (Abū Maṣṣūr, may God have mercy on him) said: In this statement, what is intended by the phrase "the most beneficial" is only wisdom, so this is [the same point as] the first. If He intends another meaning by it, then the position of knowing the most beneficial is the same as, "Why did He [create]?"<sup>553</sup> In addition, [the Mu'tazilī] is asked about the condition for His action of the most beneficial: "Why is it required?" In fact, it is [the Mu'tazila] who should be most ashamed of this phrase [i.e., "the most beneficial"]. This is because whatever is made a condition for the most beneficial may be in its own right a condition for corruption, even the greatest corruption. It is impossible for a thing that is wisdom to become folly later on, whereas the interpretation of "the most beneficial" means to be most beneficial for another. However, according to them, there may occur corruption due to it. The interpretation of wisdom [on the contrary] is "hitting the mark", which is placing everything in its proper place. This is the meaning of justice and [God's] action does not leave it.<sup>554</sup>

[Al-Māturīdī] said: God is a creator in His essence because the name ["creator"] is one of praise and glorification. It is impossible that God, exalted is He, deserves this name due to another, such that He is obliged to benefit them. Whoever's deed is characterized like that is needy. Since it is established that God is a creator in His essence, it is certainly impossible that He is not a creator. The question, "Why [did God create]?" is an impossible question to ask, just as is the question, "Why did [God] have the power?" and "Why did God know?"<sup>555</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

553 To subject "the most beneficial" to any criterion beyond wisdom becomes an impermissible questioning of the divine.

554 The main distinction that al-Māturīdī draws is that wisdom is, in a sense, unchanging and absolute. There is some definite criterion of wisdom, known in its fullness to God and not humanity, that pertains to the ordering of all things and is inconsistent with folly. The Mu'tazilī principle of "the most beneficial" is directed towards the benefit of others. Yet this is not inconsistent with the generation of corruption that undermines the idea of omnibenevolence.

555 These two essential predications are chosen because the Mu'tazila affirm them. The general principle is that any property that God possesses essentially cannot be further questioned. Since for al-Māturīdī God possesses all of His attributes in this way, including actions, He cannot be questioned in any respect.

3) Another group said: Since God is generous, gracious and powerful, He needs to be characterized with overflowing generosity. Therefore, there must be creatures that God bountifully created and to whom He overflows with His generosity. In addition, God is omnipotent, and power not exercised in action is wasted. That is why God created [the world.] *God alone leads to success.*

4) Another group said: The question ["Why did God create the creation?"] is impossible because it requires a cause to precede what is created. The cause is either a creature, so asking about it is like asking about [the creation of] all creatures; or it is not, such that there would be other than a deity in eternity. On the contrary, He made the creation, as explained earlier, by creating the creation through His essence. *God alone leads to success.*

5) Another group said: The question ["Why did God create the world?"] may only mean the following:

i) Why did God create this world and not another? Hence, this question about [the world] is like [that question of "why"].

ii) The following [question] is similar: Why did God not create the creation, so it existed at an earlier time than it was created? For creation is not other than time. Rather, [time] informs about the existence of the world, which becomes a time. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Or [the questioner] asks about the reality of this world. So, the question is from [the world]. In this case it is as if he says: Why am I asking? Why do I know how to ask? Why am I not mindless?<sup>556</sup> This is corrupt, because it is holding oneself back from asking questions. *God alone leads to success.*

One group said: [God] created the world through [certain] causes; [the world originates] from them, in them, and after them. This is what is intelligible from all the philosophers: that [the world was created] according to the objectives that follow the [divine] manufacture. Likewise, every agent who does not know the consequences of his action, nor the reason why he did it, is not wise.

Then, there has been disagreement over the meaning for which it was created. Someone said: The majority of the world was created for the

556 The human being is part of the world, so the question of a reason for the world should include a reason for asking this question, and then a reason for that, leading to an infinite regress.



beings tested in it because it is in them that wisdom appears. Loftiness, dominion, majesty and exaltation become manifest in them, along with wisdom and folly. Thus, they are the objective of the creation. Other creatures were created for the sake and benefit of the beings subject to testing; they are put at their service as an indication and a trial.

The tested beings, on the other hand, were created to worship or for themselves, that is, to achieve results in which they would be praised or blamed. [It is this praise and blame] that will reach them. Necessarily, their creator is exalted above both of these aspects [the motives of praise and blame]. Since the tested beings were created in need, God combined in them the elements that enable them to know their needs and provide for their fulfillment. *Strength comes from God alone.*

6) Another group said: The entire world has not been created for a reason because beyond the entire world, there is nothing to be that reason. But a part [of the world] was created for a reason. This is similar to the fact that the entire world has not been created in a place, because place is in the entire world. Rather, [place] was created as a part for another part.<sup>557</sup> Indirect action is based on this, then requital and test [as the purpose of creation].<sup>558</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

7) Al-Ḥusayn [b. Muḥammad al-Najjār]<sup>559</sup> answers this question [that is, "Why was the world created?"] as follows: [God] has created the world for many reasons: as an indication and evidence, then as a lesson and admonition, then as a blessing and mercy, then as nutrition and sustenance to be used to meet needs. Part [of the world] has been created as a blessing to one and a test to another. [He also] said: If creatures had been initially created for pure benefit and no more, nothing could have happened before or after, nothing would have been created before the tested beings,

<sup>557</sup> Place only exists insofar that one part of the world is relative to another. See 2.16 (3).

<sup>558</sup> Human beings tested with obedience, acting freely, and then receiving reward or punishment are all parts of the world that can be meaningfully understood as reasons for the creation of other parts.

<sup>559</sup> Al-Ḥusayn al-Najjār (d. ca 220/835) was a Basran scholar who took on ideas from Dirār b. 'Amr and held a similar position on the periphery of the Mu'tazila. Al-Māturīdī cites al-Najjār a number of times in *The Book of Monotheism*, sometimes in a positive light and at other times more negatively. See van Ess, *Theology and Society*, Vol. 4, 167-82.

nothing would have changed from one state to another, and nothing would have increased or decreased.<sup>560</sup> Since God has created creatures that cannot be encompassed by imaginations and cannot be seen by human vision, it is established that it is not the case [that the world has been created just for the benefit of humanity].<sup>561</sup> Instead, God has placed things in their proper place and altered things from benefit to harm and from harm to benefit.<sup>562</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

The Jurist (may God have mercy on him) said: The summary of this chapter is as follows: According to them,<sup>563</sup> no action of His is preferred because other than what He has done is impossible for Him. Hence, He has made the quality of injustice permanent through His every action. Nor has He done what He has done by choice because if other than the [present world] originated from Him, He would corrupt [it] and would be incapable of rectifying [it] in another [world]. This is the utmost degree of the quality of blameworthiness. *God alone leads to success.*

If it had been impossible for God to do other than what He has done, He would have benefited from His deed and would have needed it so that He was praised on its basis. For one who deserves praise only because of something else, depends on it for the obtainment of praise and benefits. For their statement is as follows: God's act is other than Himself; it is impossible for Him to fail to perform that act and to commit other than the act He has done because any other act lowers His rank and disgraces Him. Thus, benefit is obtained through the action He performs, which according to them is something other than Him. Yet this is a sign of dependence according to the custom of rational people. *Strength comes from God alone.*

560 This takes a similar approach to al-Māturīdī's argument from natural evil in 2.2 (3), though it is specifically directed against the Mu'tazilī doctrine of the "most beneficial". The contention this time is that a world with only benefit would be entirely harmonious and therefore static.

561 The first argument in this paragraph shows that as there is change and development, things were not created for pure benefit. The second argument makes the same point by pointing to the existence of things that fall outside of human sensory experience.

562 For further discussion on al-Māturīdī's definition of wisdom, see Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, 161-64.

563 This likely refers to Neoplatonic philosophers who uphold a necessitarian picture of reality.



### [3.2. The Wisdom in God's Commands and Prohibitions]

Next, it must be accepted that God commands and forbids, encourages and warns [His servants]. From what has already been said on the subject, a sufficient portion is mentioned by al-Husayn al-Najjār: God has created a creature subdued by discipline, aware of benefit and harm, and who takes what he witnesses as evidence for what he does not. It is not possible that He fails to obligate<sup>564</sup> awareness [of Him] and not possible that He fails to restrict<sup>565</sup> ignorance of Him, as this would be to make permissible lying and every sin. In addition, the one who created [man] has given many blessings in terms of physical structure. It is rationally necessary to be grateful for the blessings. Therefore, He calls on him to fulfill [this gratitude]. Promises and threats encourage man to glorify God and discourage him from taking [religion] lightly. Then God honored man with all kinds of benevolence. That is why the human being's reward is infinite. Since disbelief is the last limit of disobedience, so is its punishment. Similarly, belief is affirming the infinite and inexhaustible, and disbelief is denying the infinite and inexhaustible. So, their recompense reflects this [in terms of being eternal] and on this basis sins less than disbelief are forgivable, because they do not consist of the denial of the infinite. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: For us, the evidence for the command and prohibition is to know the one who commands and forbids. Since God has made it unique to the human beings amongst the animals to know Himself, it is impossible for the human beings to neglect it, just as it is impossible to neglect a useful thing.

Since the goodness of everything that is good and the badness of everything that is bad are in the intellect, then realized in action, commanding and prohibiting are required at their respective places.<sup>566</sup> God has created creatures that indicate His oneness and His wisdom. Therefore, it is impossible to deprive creatures of the knowledge of [His oneness and

<sup>564</sup> Reading *yafriḍu* with K, 100.

<sup>565</sup> Reading MS. 48r as *yanḥasiru*.

<sup>566</sup> As indicated earlier in this section, the servant can determine the moral reality of what God commands and prohibits (at least to some degree) even in the absence of revelation. See 4.6 (5).

wisdom]. Otherwise, His creation would be in vain. When responsibility is removed, the wisdom of creation also disappears, because [without responsibility creation has no reason] to come into being except to perish. One who builds something only to destroy it is not wise, but wanton.<sup>567</sup>

Then the promise and the threat [by God] are aimed at encouragement and warning because if there were no [promises and threats], the benefit of obedience and the harm of disobedience would disappear and there would be no benefit for the created one in his action. If the obedient enjoys no benefit and the disobedient suffers no harm, the command and the prohibition would have no meaning because they are not for the benefit of the one who commands and forbids. Therefore, the promise and the threat are necessary in terms of wisdom.

Additionally, the command and the prohibition enable one to fight the [lower] soul and force it to do what nature dislikes. The soul flees from what nature dislikes, so one who is testing does not force and direct nature to what he intends and commands except by providing promises and threats. In fact, if one [who is tested] sees [the promise and the threat], it becomes easy for him to abandon the desires and it seems to him simple to bear severe burdens.

Then, man is created to dislike doing things that are not intended to benefit his fate or prevent something harmful to it. Therefore, his deeds should have such a purpose. This is the due right of the promise and the threat. Had it not been for the two, the fate of [God's] enemy and friend would have been the same. Since they differ in choice and preference, their fates must also be different. *God alone leads to success.*

In fact, one can see that all the rewards that God will give to man [in the Hereafter] have been given as a bounty, because He has given to man beforehand blessings for which he deserves to be thankful to the utmost degree. Therefore, the reward that He will give will be a bounty from Him. Then, such is the case with multiplying this [grace]. For example, God says: "Whosoever brings a good deed will receive tenfold the like thereof, while whosoever brings an ill-deed will be awarded the like thereof."<sup>568</sup> In

<sup>567</sup> See al-Māturīdī's Introduction.

<sup>568</sup> Q. 6:160.



the verse, God has mentioned the punishment required by wisdom and multiplied the reward in proportion to the weight of the good deeds, because the basis of rewarding is God's bounty. *Strength comes from God alone.*

This is what we can say as best about the contexts in which the command and prohibition are necessary. In addition, there is enough evidence in the reports in which the messengers brought promises and threats from God to accept that there is a great wisdom in [the promise and the threat], even though our intellects cannot comprehend it. Moreover, just as it is impossible for other organs to be stripped of their beneficial functions, which are the reason for their existence, the intellect does not accept that it be rendered dysfunctional. Also, what I have mentioned about other organs applies to the act and its indication.<sup>569</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

### 3.3. An Enquiry Regarding Monotheism [Self-Knowledge and Knowledge of the Lord]

Suppose someone says: Rational people have agreed that "one who knows himself knows his Lord",<sup>570</sup> but they have disagreed on the aspect of this knowledge.

The Dualists said: Since man knows that he himself comprises good and evil, he knows that each of these aspects has a Lord.

The Jews, on the other hand, make [God] a single part.<sup>571</sup>

The Mushabbiha said: [God] is a body, because in the visible world knowing the self pertains to the body; [hence, what one knows in the unseen must also be a body].

<sup>569</sup> The picture is as follows: the human being is able to intellectually understand the command and prohibition that come from God. Secondly, their organs are a precondition for being able to realize these commands and prohibitions through actions. Finally, the actions themselves as changes in bodies understood through their shifting composition and relative accidental motion, become realized in accordance with them. The proper operation of each aspect of the human being is necessary by virtue of divine wisdom, so that the creation is not in vain. This then, links the grounding of ethics with the divine action model.

<sup>570</sup> This is sometimes given as a hadith, but can be traced to a saying of Yahyā b. Mu'adh al-Rāzī (d. 258/871), a Central Asian Sufi. See al-Sakhāwī, *al-Maqāṣid al-ḥasana*, 657.

<sup>571</sup> This use of language is slightly strange. He may be acknowledging Jewish monotheism, in contrast to the Dualists, while still critiquing an overly anthropomorphic approach to the divine.

Jahm [b. Šafwān] said: Since [man] knows that he came into existence after he did not exist and that he is a thing, a body, knowing, hearing and seeing, he knows that whatever has those characteristics is temporal and that it is impossible for the Lord who created him to be temporal.

According to us, one who knows himself knows his Lord. This can be explained as follows: One cannot know the truth of his accidents such as hearing and vision, nor the way to fix those of them that are damaged, nor the amount of time and space they take up, nor the various needs that befall him, nor the sources of these needs and the means of their satisfaction. So, this is [the human] condition. In addition, one knows that [these needs] disappear by what he witnesses in himself. Therefore, it is very unlikely for one to know the states – which are known to be diverse – that he has gone through from the moment he came into existence to the state he is in; it is very difficult to conceive of it in his imagination; and it is something that his intellect is incapable of encompassing. [From all this,] he realizes it is necessary that he does not govern his present situation. On the contrary, if this task had been left to him, he would [have needed to] know all [those states] to take care [of himself]. For if one had the power for any of that, he would not be pushed into this constant ignorance and inability to meet his needs and fix his damaged parts that I have discussed.

It is at this point man knows [his Lord]. For among the creatures in the world that he can perceive through his senses, man is the one who is most skilled in ruling, who best understands the realities he encounters, and who is the quickest to grasp what is communicated and explained. Thus, he knows that the governance of his existence is not in his own hands in terms of creation, annihilation and survival. Then, [he knows God] through the beginning of all sensible things, because they are under His governance, as are those who are confused about their needs. He knows that a being like himself in terms of comprehending matters and grasping means can come into existence through one who is free from the causes to which he is subject and in which he is immersed. Thus, he knows that [this being] is strong rather than weak, knowing rather than ignorant and has an absolute and unchallengeable authority in His governance. Accordingly, he knows that He is majestic and lofty; nothing and no cause from the world resembles Him. For if a thing resembles Him in any aspect, then temporality or



non-existence<sup>572</sup> would be required in [that aspect], or [there would be] another to govern him. All things are like this because there is a correspondence between them in terms of needs, incapacity and weakness, then they resemble each other in every aspect in terms of temporality. Thus, man must know that God is different from him in all aspects, and that such aspects belong to him not to the one who governs him. This describes the Lord as He deserves. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Considering these explanations, the falsity of the following statement by Jahm b. Ṣafwān is revealed: [God] was not knowing and powerful, then He became so.<sup>573</sup> Also false is the statement of anyone saying: [God] was not acting and speaking, then He became so. [These two statements are false] because they make possible change of aspects and states [in God], yet [these aspects and states] are the very means through which the servant knows himself to be created and temporal. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Man knows God through the things that I have mentioned, that is, his voluntary reception of various states as well as through his possession of sublime attributes such as knowledge, power, life, hearing and vision that reveal he has come into existence not through natures and foods that are incapable of choice and ignorant of [different] states, but through a knowing agent. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Again, the fact that man is capable of doing both good and evil and that he is possessed of various states is proof that the one who governs him is not characterized by contingency and variation in states; on the contrary, everything happens according to His determination of it. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Another group said: Whoever knows his "hidden soul",<sup>574</sup> knows his Lord. The hidden soul is the being created for rectifying matters, carrying lofty features, governing creatures, and perceiving hidden things by thinking and reflecting on causes.

572 Reading *qidam* (eternity) as 'adam (non-existence) on MS. 50r, because the context is the hypothetical scenario of God resembling the world in some contingent and needy aspect. If it is read "eternity", then it would have to refer to something in the creation resembling God in terms of being eternal, which al-Māturīdī also sees as destructive to God's lordship.

573 See Schöck, "Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/745-6) and the 'Jahmiyya' and Ḍirār b. 'Amr (d. 200/815)," 58-59.

574 The Arabic term is *nafsuḥu al-khafiyya*.



What this [group] has said is good. But the things I have already described may be enough to know the Creator and suffice us from perceiving what is hidden in [man]. Since this being has hidden states; has access to the knowledge of hidden things that become manifest through means; and by it the [human being] knows what is hidden from him: it was initially named "soul" and appeared. *Strength comes from God alone.*

### 3.4. Enquiry: [God may be Named "Thing" but not "Body"]

The [term] "thing" means affirmation and affirmation of isness, nothing else, because [the phrase], "It is not a thing" means negation. Thus, one knows that God, exalted is He, is a thing [i.e., an entity] without negating that he himself is a thing. [Man] negates most of the states of his soul, but he knows his soul without negating its thingness [that is, its existence]. Hence, he knows his Lord not in the aspect that he knows that he is a thing. Knowing one's own thingness does not prevent him from knowing that his Lord is a thing because it is not thingness that indicates to the Lord.<sup>575</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

As for the term "body", it is the name for every limited thing, while the term "thing" is affirmation, nothing else. The existence of the world, as it is, contains evidence for the affirmation [of God]. That is why [God] is named a "thing". Since [the body] is finite in terms of being limited, and not in terms of being a thing, it is evidence negating a limit from God, majestic is His praise. If the oneness and lordship [of God] are intended by "limit", then such is God [i.e., He is indeed one and Lord]. But the term "limit" is invalid because it is generally used to refer to the end of a thing in terms of width, and so on, of which God is exalted above. This [finitude] is the meaning of the body in the visible world. [The body] also necessitates

575 The term "thing" refers to nothing other than that something exists. Hence, the application of the term to the limited existence of a human being does not disqualify it from being used for God's necessary existence. Human beings are ignorant of many of their own states, as mentioned in the preceding section, but they have necessary knowledge of their own experiences. Yet their knowledge of God, who does not have changing states, is not based on this self-knowledge but on evidence from the world. In other words, one knows of one's own existence despite one's changing states, whereas one knows God exists because of one's changing states (in interaction with the rest of the world).



directions, each of which may be longer, wider, and shorter. That is why it is false to name [God a "body"]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Then, the term "selfhood" (*al-huwiyya*) is an allusion to existence in the visible world, and its interpretation is the negation of non-existence from [a thing]. God Most High always exists timelessly without changing, without disappearing, without passing from one state to another, without moving, and without stopping because all these describe the variation of states. One who varies in terms of states is not able to be free of them. Whoever cannot be free of such states – which are temporals – must be characterized by temporals. This abolishes the oneness and then eternity of God. Then something else would govern Him because were any of these states due to His essence, they could not change due to His permanent essence. Thus, such changing states [for God] and passing from state to state would lead to the existence of another [to govern Him].

### [3.5. God is Not in a Place]

All this is a proof that [God] is exalted above being described by place, since it has been established that God existed without place. There is not in the attribution to Him that He is "...established on the Throne"<sup>576</sup> affirmation of place. Neither do the following statements [prove that He has a place]: "We are nearer to him than his jugular vein";<sup>577</sup> "There is no secret conference of three but He is their fourth";<sup>578</sup> "And We are nearer unto him than you are, but you see not."<sup>579</sup> For to say that God has a place is not an expression of glorification and reverence. On the contrary, places gain honor through Him and their value differs when He favors one place over another. [This happens] by assigning a place for His good creatures or marking it off as a place of worship and glorification for Himself. It is not the case that the rank of one of the kings or good people on earth is elevated through place. So, how about the Overwhelming Ruler through whom the value of a place and the majesty of a station are only raised? Since this is the case, the idea that the attribution of a place to Him means His glorification has been

576 Q. 20:5.

577 Q. 50:16.

578 Q. 58:7.

579 Q. 56:85.

refuted. Moreover, the attribution of a place to Him indicates neediness, and He is exalted above that. Therefore, it is not necessary to say that He is in a place based on the verse, "The Gracious is established upon the Throne" because the phrase expresses loftiness and majesty, and the like of that is impossible to achieve through His creatures. Hence, [His being established upon the Throne] obtains in terms of the loftiness and exaltation that He deserves in His essence. What He is in His essence, He existed thus without creatures; it is not possible that He becomes characterized [i.e., by loftiness] through creatures [i.e., the Throne]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Moreover, this belief [that God has a place upon the Throne] is based on prior knowledge of the state of one who is ascribed with [place] in the visible world before attribution to [God] as a possibility.<sup>580</sup> Furthermore, God, exalted is He, existed without place, and that is the belief of people. It is impossible that the understanding of attribution [of the Throne to Him] changes from what it was prior [to its existence], and such an understanding must be applied in this way to His creatures. The attribution of specific things in the visible world to God honors them by making them from amongst the pleasing matters and praiseworthy states. So, how is the Throne different from that? *Strength comes from God alone.*

Accordingly, the doctrine that He is characterized as being in all places is false because there is no difference between ascribing one special place to Him and ascribing all places. In fact, the single place better expresses His majesty, because this makes a specific mention of the thing in question, which suggests conferring dignity and honor.<sup>581</sup> In the final analysis, this means to emphasize its sublimity. [On the other hand, if the thing attributed to Him is cited] in an absolute and plural form, the emphasis is on specifying the reality of God's attribute. For example, one says, "The Lord of all things" and "The God of all things" to glorify and revere the Lord. In contrast, the expressions "The Lord of Muḥammad" and "The God of Abraham" aim to honor and glorify those two [i.e., Muḥammad and Abraham].

580 The only reason that the text is interpreted in the way that it is must be due to the existence of people, especially kings, sitting on thrones in the visible world.

581 The purpose of making this case is because of the *a fortiori* argument it allows. If God being in all places is inferior to being in one specific place yet the latter is impossible, then obviously the former is too.



By analogy with that, attributing the Throne [to God] necessitates glory and honor for it, whereas attributing all places [to Him] necessitates characterizing God with them. That is repugnant because God is not described by [being in any place] in eternity. Nothing is qualified as being near to God in terms of the distance and place of travel, and one cannot describe Him as being close to anything in this respect. For that is the aspect of limits and the determination of places. Yet God existed without place, and He is as He existed, exalted above time and place because upon them depend the limits and ends of things.<sup>582</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

### 3.6. Enquiry: [Attributing Whatness, Howness, and Nearness to God]

1) The words of a person may allude to [God] in place of His name. This is like the statement of Pharaoh, “What is the Lord of the worlds?” Moses replied, “Lord of the heavens and the earth.”<sup>583</sup> Similarly, God asked Moses, “What is that in your right hand, O Moses?” and Moses replied, “This is my staff...”<sup>584</sup> The answer to the first question [that is, Pharaoh’s question] is to say: “The Creator, the Maker, the Omniscient Lord.”

Sometimes [the question] is, “What is He [i.e., God]?” That is: “What is His attribute?” Therefore, the answer is “[God is] Hearing, Seeing”.

And “What is He [i.e., God]?” that is, [asking] about which whatness from the creatures is applied to Him. [In this case] He is exalted above having a likeness.

Sometimes the meaning of the question, “What is He [i.e., God]?” is “What is His action?” Therefore, the answer is: “He created creatures, placed everything in its proper place, and that is His wisdom.”

Also, sometimes the meaning of the question, “What is He [i.e., God]?” is “From whom did He come”. Therefore, [the answer to this question is,]

582 Al-Māturīdī here shows that time is to be negated from God just as place is as both imply contingency. Though he has a consistent focus on arguments relating to location, which reflects the implied interlocutors, it is clear that he rejects any sequential aspect to the life of God, and it is necessary to interpret His words in the light of this concept of timelessness.

583 Q. 26:23-24.

584 Q. 20:17-18.

"He is exalted above coming from a thing. Rather, He is the existentiator of things." *Strength comes from God alone.*

2) The question about His howness may have two meanings:

i) It may be meant to ask about a likeness for Him, thus rendering Him the like of something. However, God is one and majestic above similars.

ii) It may mean, "How is His attribute?" The answer to this is, like the first, that His attribute has not how" because this is asking about the likeness, whereas God is exalted above resemblance in essence and attribute. But if by this question it is meant: "Can He be described?", it is said: "Yes! With the mercy, knowledge and power by which He has described Himself."

One might say: "Where is He?" This is a question about place, and we have already explained that He is far exalted above [being in a place]. God, exalted is He, is not characterized by being connected to things nor being separate from them, not entering into them nor exiting from them with respect to distance, based on who He is.<sup>585</sup> This is because God Most High existed without another. Therefore, as has already been explained, it is impossible that God pass from what He was due to the existence of another. With an explanation that leaves the attributes and resemblance of creatures, it is possible [to use the language of proximity with respect to God].<sup>586</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

God is characterized by being near in terms of helping and supporting, honoring and selecting, having mercy and benevolence, and facilitating and guiding and so on of this kind. This is because all of these are essential qualities, so one can say: God is eternally merciful to His friends with a love for them that applies to the time of their being His friends, and a hate for His enemies in the same way. As for aspects that are the reality of these attributes that are realized by another rather than Him being essentially characterized by them, they are invalid [to apply to God]. This is because there would be no escape from praise, exaltation and glorification for [God], which would come to him through another. So, He would obtain praise and benefit by His creation of creatures. However, God is independent in

585 Once body and place have been negated from God, these pairs of qualifications have no meaning.

586 This sets up the descriptions in the next paragraph.



Himself and is exalted above gaining praise and benefit through another. That is why God, Mighty and Majestic, is not described by it.

As for saying that He is characterized by His action, then His action cannot be identical with its effect, as this is not observed in the visible world, and because He is characterized by His action, but not that of another. As we have already explained, His being qualified by another obligates a need for it, and for Him to be characterized by it in eternity, because it is impossible for Him to change or disappear. Were it possible for Him to be characterized by another's state, it would be possible for Him to be characterized by each of His creatures, and that is out of the question. We have already explained this. *Strength comes from God alone.*

### [3.7. The Wisdom in the Creation of Harmful Substances]

The Jurist Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The wisdom in the creation of snakes and [similar] harmful substances has various aspects, even though the human mind may not understand the essence of the wisdom of lordship. It has been previously stated that wisdom is necessary for everything in the aspect in which it is created by God. However, the whatness of this wisdom may not be known. [The aspects of wisdom in the creation of harmful substances are as follows]:

1) To test [people] through the harmful and useful things that are present, so as to let them know the pleasure of the reward they will enjoy due to their obedience and the pain of the punishment they will suffer due to their sinning. This is because creatures are disposed to seek the results of their actions. For this reason, He has set an example from sensory knowledge, so that the promised things might be conceived in the imagination and the path might be eased through it. *God alone leads to success.*

2) To be tested is bearing hardship that may become easier or harder on the body due to thinking and reflection. People differ in how much trouble they take to think and reflect because they do not benefit immediately, whereas it prevents people from pleasures and desires and it is difficult for the body to tolerate such a thing. Lack of thinking and reflection brings division and separation, giving rise to enmity and disputation. Conversely,

agreement brings friendliness and peace. For this reason, God has set in that which He has created for human beings things similar to enemies due to the harms they contain, and things similar to friends due to their benefits. This is the case so that evil will repel them in the way that one customarily deals [with enemies], such that when one is tried with something similar in their own substance, they know how to [behave towards it]: alertness, readiness, assistance and support. For this reason, children are commanded to get used to worship and good morals when they can, so that it is easy for them when they reach the age of responsibility. The same applies to the creation of the things mentioned. *God knows best.*

Despite the fact that the substances of creatures are different in terms of benefits and harms, God has made them indicate a wise and omniscient governor of them [i.e., Himself] and His oneness as if [they were] a single substance in terms of the harmony of [their] indication and witness. *Strength comes from God alone.*

This reveals His astonishing wisdom in bringing together as one the harmful and the useful, the good and the bad, despite their contradictions, in indicating His oneness and attesting His lordship.

Again, He created [evil] to subdue tyrants and kings through it, so that they would know their weakness, so that they would not be deceived by the multitude of their servants and soldiers, and so that they would not exceed God's limits. This is because they would see that one who holds authority in His power is able to employ whomsoever He wills to trouble whomsoever He wills. *Strength comes from God alone.*

[Another wisdom underlying His creation of evil is] to let one who reflects on His creatures that rely on the substance of harm and benefit know that He is independent and exalted so that needs cannot touch Him. For, the action of one with this quality [i.e., one who is dependent] only takes place in ways that benefit and do not harm.<sup>587</sup> [An additional wisdom is thus] to make it known that God has power over everything [including the committing of evil].

587 This goes back to al-Māturīdī's argument that only a truly independent deity can create both good and bad, benefit and harm. It seems to relate to his attack on those Baghdādī Mu'tazila who upheld the doctrine of *al-aṣḥāh*, and his criticism that this amounts to the dualistic idea of a limited deity that creates only good.



On the other hand, no harmful substances are observed except that they contain benefits that creatures are incapable of encompassing and knowing their essence. Let us take the case of fire as an example, which although it burns, makes food suitable for eating. Water can be the cause of life and death for every living thing. Similarly, every bitter or poisonous substance has a cure for a severe illness. This is so that anyone who reflects may come to know that the idea that evil and good exist [each in their own] substances is false and baseless. On the contrary, every substance causes both harms and benefits. Thus, in this is one of the greatest signs of monotheism.

There are two more aspects [in the existence of evil]:

3) [It shows] the complete power to exercise dominion over the harmful and the useful, so that one hopes for the useful and fears the harmful. One who does not rule them both cannot fulfill this matter because he is not feared, what he possesses is not desired, and he may be defeated by whoever does rule both.

4) [Through the existence of evil], lessons are perfected, and the command and prohibition are fulfilled. Thus, thinking and reflection are the domain of [the harmful and beneficial], because through them are an admonition and a lesson. *Strength comes from God alone.*

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## Chapter Four

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# Enquiries of Heresiography<sup>588</sup>

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588 See the Editor's Introduction on the rationale for this being a separate chapter.



#### 4.1. Enquiry: [Various Doctrines on the Origin of the World]

We begin by praising God, the Exalted and the Praiseworthy.<sup>589</sup> We turn to Him by paying gratitude and glorifying Him for guiding and supporting us. We are eager for Him to aid and assist us in what we seek, because He is a witness to all things. We ask Him to confer upon Muḥammad the highest blessing that He has bestowed upon any from the best of His creatures, as well as to grant him his request, and to connect us to him by His generosity, because He is independent and generous.

The Jurist Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Now, once the signs that the world is temporal and the evidence that it is governed by another came to light, I pondered over the reasons why people disagreed about the [origin of the] world. [We have said that it is clear that the world is temporal and under the dominion of another] because every substance and element of it testifies through its own substance that it has been created and governed, and that there must be one who is omniscient about its states, independent in ruling over its needs, and wise in putting everything in its proper place, such that it does not fall into conflict and become dispersed. Based on its substance, it is not possible that [the world] has more than one governor. This would cause a conflict between the rulers over the governance of the world; each would want to show his own authority, so that his power would prevail over others and overwhelm those who challenge him. This would lead to destruction and corruption. The way out of this is for one of them to be stronger than the others and to subjugate them all, so that they all submit to him.

This is based on the idea that each substance in the world emerges according to the will of another and proceeds on its authority. Such is evidence of an omniscient and wise ruler of the world who sustains it and perfects, originating from nothing. For the wonder of the origination [of the

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589 This is the third *ḥamd* in *The Book of Monotheism*.

world] by one who knows how to create things is no less than the wonder of its continuance and sustenance as it is. Rather, [the former] is more apparent and [its] need in that for another is greater. This is because [the world] is incapable of governing itself, and the reasons for the impossibility of its self-governing are yet more manifest.<sup>590</sup> In addition, the evidence that the world came into existence after it did not exist is clearer because everyone who has an intellect and vision can remember the beginning of himself or the changing states he has gone through since earliest childhood. If a beginning is not determined for the whole [of these states], his existence disappears. Then, the fragility and weakness of one that leads to annihilation and disappearance are amongst the elements that compel him to know that he came into existence after he did not exist. If this is the case with those who are capable of governance and knowing states, then the inanimate beings, which are under the governance of the animate beings that benefit from them without being aware it, are more deserving [of coming into existence after non-existence]. Then, the fact that the inanimate are beneficial to the animate indicates that the governor of one is the governor of the other, because he has made the inanimate useful and suitable for [the animate].

Even after we have explained [the evidence] to ward off doubts from whoever is sound of soul, I have seen doubts befall [the minds] of people for three reasons:

1) The first is the tendency to imitate those to whom one is close and inclines, thus, to abandon thinking on the basis of evidence and turn to the wishes and expectations of the lower soul. They trust [such people], desire their company and hope to reach the desires of the lower soul through them; or they imagine that their views would prepare them for maturity, or grant them blessings or other means of happiness. Thus, [imitation] leads servants to attain the evil of the lower soul and its bad habits.

2) The second is that they look at existence as it falls under the senses and see that it transforms from one state to another through matter and nutrients, and that one thing generates from another. So, they think that it is impossible for things to come into existence from nothing and to be

<sup>590</sup> The argument seems to be *a fortiori*: if we can see that the world cannot govern itself once it exists, then it is even less possible that it could have brought itself into existence from nothing.



derived without a source. This is because they have never witnessed [creation *ex nihilo*], and according to them the visible world is evidence for the unseen. Then they differed [on the origin of the world]. For example, some of them said that the state of the world was like this in eternity. However, [those who said so] differed among themselves. Some of them said that the state of the world was like this in eternity, as we have already said, without design. The doctrine of the Naturalists may be explained on this basis. For them, difference and diversity are based on the divergence and relative superiority of natures. [Another group] named the [eternal natures] "prime matter". The difference that I have mentioned can be illustrated with the case of paints. That is, the appearance of paints in different colors is due to their differences in mixture and proportion. On this basis, they make the substance of the human being consist of a balance of natures, whereas that of animals is composed of their imbalance. Everything is formed according to this [mixture of natures].<sup>591</sup>

Others did not accept the source of the world as limited to four natures. Rather, [they argued] that every substance has a source, and the natures are what is most intrinsic to it.<sup>592</sup> Others claim that the world is in its present form because of the Creator, saying: He is one, and regarding Him as the efficient cause of the generation of the world. Thus, they say that the world must exist eternally through His existence, and they cite the harmony and perfection of things [as evidence] for the Creator. That [harmony and perfection] can only exist through an omniscient governor because nature does not resort to measure whereas things become orderly through it. Thus, they accept the Creator, but they consider it necessary that the world exist co-eternally because the Creator exists in eternity on the basis that things must co-exist with their causes. Since the world is the bestowal and blessing [of the Creator] and He is powerful in His essence, His generosity and graciousness are established in His essence. Thus, what His generosity necessitates and what His power generates must also exist [in eternity].<sup>593</sup>

*Strength comes from God alone.*

<sup>591</sup> See 4.3.

<sup>592</sup> This may relate to the idea of natures indwelling within primordial matter, as mentioned in 2.4.3 (2).

<sup>593</sup> See 2.5.2.



Some of them also say: This world is from a source upon which the creation originated. However, they disagree amongst themselves because some of them regard its source as primordial matter from which the Originator created this world. A group considers the Originator to be one, while another group thinks that it is the stars, the Sun, and the Moon as they are in constant motion through which the world is generated. [This group] assigned a beginning to the motion of the celestial bodies because it is impossible for one thing to come from another without a beginning. Others say that accidents appear in [the matter] and from this the world is indirectly generated. They refer to the state of the world prior [to its creation] as "prime matter" and they describe it in the same terms that the People of Monotheism describe the Creator. But then they nullify that [by describing it] as receiving accidents and changing from one state to another.

Some say that the source of the world is two, namely light and darkness, and every good and benefit comes from light, and every evil and harm comes from darkness. Some of this group have said that [light and darkness] were separate then they mixed, as we have already explained.<sup>594</sup>

The followers of the doctrine of prime and primordial matter hold that [good and evil] were one then they separated. This is because [matter] is the source, so it acted as a source for both evil and good. With separation, each performed its own act, although most of them claimed that the being of the world is by nature, not by [volitional] action.

3) The third [reason for doubts] is that they consider meanings [drawn from the visible world]. For example, they say: We find that the world comprises benefit and harm, good and evil. Then, customarily those who perform good deeds are praised, and those who benefit others are regarded as merciful and wise. In contrast, those who do evil are reproached and those who harm others are hard-hearted and foolish. Therefore, it is impossible for evil or harm, or its like in the visible world, to come to anyone from God who is wise and merciful. Also, folly and hard-heartedness cannot [characterize] Him. These [negative qualities] are to derive [worldly] benefit or to ward off harm from oneself, so how [are they appropriate] for one [i.e., God], who is neither benefited nor harmed by anything. In their opinion,

594 See 2.5.3.



the wise in the visible world is one who tries to accrue benefit and harm through his deed. As for one who harms another without any benefit, he is not wise. Therefore, they said: This [i.e., the appearance of good and evil] is due to the differentiation of the source from which the world has arisen, so that every existent in [the world] may return to its source in good and evil. Or [the source] was one and contained two substances, then they were separated, so that each was generated from the same [source] as the other. Or [the source was differentiated] through the appearance of accidents in it. The doctrine of the Dahrīs, who both deny the Creator and view the creator as more than one, amounts to this. The Dualists named the good by its substance "light" and the evil by its substance "darkness", while the Zoroastrians named the good "God" and the evil "Satan".

#### [4.2. A Critique of the Dualists]

1) The Jurist Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: If these sects had carefully examined the evidence that was mentioned above, they would have realized the limitation of their intellects in comprehending human wisdom let alone encompassing the wisdom of lordship. In addition, the view that they have of "choice" should prevent them from claiming to know the reality of wisdom and folly. For, according to their teaching, they can see only evil through the substance of evil and only good through the substance of good. Then, it is not known whether what they call folly or wisdom is an act of evil or an act of good. To them, every human being is a mixture of the two things [i.e., light and dark], seeing through each of them the opposite of what one sees through the other. Hence, perhaps one sees wisdom as folly and folly as wisdom. Then, one's statement that what he sees is good cannot be trusted, because what he says is all a falsehood [from the viewpoint] of the substance of darkness, but all a truth from that of the substance of light. Therefore, it is not known which one of the two substances he speaks through.<sup>595</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

i) [Of light and darkness], one has no power over harm and the other has no power over benefit, so the locus for hope and fear disappears,

<sup>595</sup> This is an epistemological argument that contents the Dualist's basic dichotomy between light and darkness, with the human being seen as a mixture of the two, makes it impossible for them to distinguish between good and bad.



and as a result, knowledge of wisdom and folly is no longer useful. Then, if each of the substances [of light and darkness] acts by nature, it is impossible for knowledge of wisdom and folly to be realized by nature. Wisdom is putting everything in its proper place while folly is putting everything out of its place.<sup>596</sup> It is impossible to characterize the natural thing with [putting everything in its place] because that is a choice.<sup>597</sup> However, according to them, light does not know what folly is, such that it can be on guard for it. Nor [conversely] does darkness know what wisdom is. Ignorance of the whatness of a thing and the place for it is evil. In this case, according to their doctrine, knowledge and ignorance, then power and weakness, are combined in the substance of light. This is because it cannot drive away folly, nor can it prevent darkness from harming it. Thus, according to them, the substance of good is mixed with evil, and there is no good in the substance of darkness. Therefore, according to their teaching, evil prevails over good. That which is good itself did not recognize evil and folly, so how is it possible that one [i.e., the human being] who has arisen from the substance of good could recognize good and evil once evil has prevailed over it?

ii) Every being possessing a nature is subjugated because it is incapable of preventing what nature necessitates and mandating the opposite. This necessitates the existence of a subjugator who makes that one evil by nature and this one good. If this [subjugator] was reduced to the two [i.e., good and evil], the same would apply to them [i.e., another agent would be required to make each of them what they are]. This is similar to the fact that something is hot and cold due to [the agent] that makes it like that. This necessitates belief in the One.<sup>598</sup>

Whoever says that each of [light and darkness] is a powerful creator, then each of them either knows and has power to prevent the other from its act or it [does not know] and has no power to do so. If it neither knows nor

596 Or, in more technical theological language: "wisdom is originating everything at its proper locus".

597 That is, a nature can only act in a compelled way for a single purpose. God's wise action existentiates everything in the proper locus assigned for it, which requires choice. For God, who is essentially wise, failing to act with wisdom is inconceivable.

598 In other words, if the compelled action of natures in the world prompts an originator for them, then any attempt to explain the origin of the world as two originators that each can only act in one way prompts a further inference to a single originator on the same basis.



has [this] power, ignorance and incapacity will unite in light, which abolishes the reason for professing dualism. If it knows and has power, but fails to act to prevent it, it would be described as evil.

Then, light is either hostile or not hostile to darkness and it either loves or hates dealing with it. If it is not hostile to it and loves it, that [attitude] is evil because it is evil to abandon hostility to the enemy and love it. On the other hand, if it is hostile to the enemy and hates it, then enmity and hatred are evil as is known in the visible world. If [the Dualist] says: "In the visible world, this is due to the mixing of flaws," then a similar situation applies to all the wisdoms he denies in the creation of the two kinds [that is, good and evil]." *Strength comes from God alone.*

iii) One should profess the existence of knowledge after ignorance, doing good after doing evil, regret after sinning, professing the existence of evil after the intellect [comprehends it], and believing that something is a reality after believing that it is false, because these [all] exist in the visible world. Either we accept that light is the source of both things [in each pair]; but then ignorance, evil-doing, sin, folly and every other [bad] thing would originate from light, so the Dualist teaching in this respect is refuted. Or we say that evil-doing, folly, and ignorance are from darkness, while profession [of the existence of evil], doing good [after doing evil], and regret [after sinning] are from light. But this would be a lie, [an act of] favoritism and prejudice. While, for one, all these come from the act of darkness, one attributes them to light.<sup>599</sup> In addition, to profess what is not the case is a lie and folly. If these two [i.e., both things in each pair] are from darkness, both good and evil will emerge from darkness [and Dualism will be refuted].

iv) Again, light is either anxious and sad because of the evil that has happened to its friends, or it is not. If it is anxious and sad, then [the Dualist's] claim that all light is pleasure and joy is refuted. If it is not sad, his statement that the act of evil-doing and harming (alone) is hardheartedness and strictness, not mercy,<sup>600</sup> will be refuted. Yet that is the very meaning of

599 The crucial point in this argument is contained in this sentence. These three elements cannot be simply attributed to light as they all originate in acts of evil, or darkness. If that is the case, then everything in reality comes from darkness, which mirrors the earlier case that everything comes from light. In either case, Dualism is refuted.

600 This is because light is not sad when it should be, which proves its lack of mercy, and its hardheartedness (*Translator*).



dualism. Then, it is said to [the Dualist]: "Is it possible for light to move after stillness or not? Does it want something and then abandon it? And does it love something and then hate it?" On this subject, we say something similar to what I have mentioned in the first chapter.<sup>601</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

Regarding the discrepancy and opposition between the states that we suggest to refute his view, the Dualist may claim that the reason for this being so in the visible world is the mixing of flaws from darkness with the substance of light, so that [light] sees things differently from their real form and knowledge emerges continually<sup>602</sup> on the basis of [this false image]. Thus, it is said [in response]: It is hardly strange that your position is not wisdom and mercy, but rather folly and hardheartedness! The only reason that it came from you is due to the flaws of darkness that mix with you and prevent you from seeing anything in its own substance and form. *Strength comes from God alone.*

2) Then, since God, exalted is He, is the Powerful in His essence, nothing can incapacitate Him. [Since] He is the Independent in His essence, nothing can render Him dependent upon anything. [Since] He is omniscient in His essence, it is impossible that He be unaware of anything. [And since] He is wise in His essence, it is impossible that He would make a mistake in acting. [Hence,] the idea has been refuted that His creation might involve a discrepancy that would cause a conflict in its evidence and opposition in the governance of the world. As regards everything of which our intellects cannot fathom the wisdom, once it has been established that [God] is its creator and originator, we know that it involves a deep wisdom that cannot be comprehended. [The Dualist] is unaware that each of our senses is made to perceive what falls within its scope. One sense may fall short in encompassing something that another sense may come to encompass. The same is true for the intellect, as it is a limited creation that cannot exceed the limit set for it. In addition, it is found that [the intellect] may perceive things that are obviously good to be ugly and things that are clearly sound to be corrupt. Thus, something may interfere with [the intellect] to prevent it from [comprehending] the essence of what comes to it of wisdom and folly.

<sup>601</sup> This seems to be a reference to 2.5.3. If so, it also acts as a piece of evidence for the integrity of the book's internal composition.

<sup>602</sup> Or: "mass-transmitted knowledge emerges" (*yaqa'u al-tawātur*), which may reflect a dualist rejection of this kind of testimonial knowledge.



What is more, how can one appreciate such an aspect of wisdom [when he has the following qualities]: he is enamored of his own neediness; his poverty is attractive in his eyes; he is made by custom and habit to see the ugly things as beautiful and vice versa? Also, one who, from these flaws, is characterized in [his inability] to encompass the wisdom of lordship is incapable of creating an action from nothing. Instead, he employs organs and uses tools. Thus, once one has learned that he is acting with a created power and a granted knowledge, how can he whose action is from such a place assume rulership through incapacity and ignorance over one [i.e., God] who is powerful in His essence? [This person is] is incapable of knowing his own likeness, [let alone his] ignorance. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Based on the first chapter, one should say to [the Dualist]: When darkness has harmed light by ending it [in terms of their mixing], can light be safe from it and prevent darkness from it? If [the Dualist] says "No", he accepts that light is foolish, because such is the behavior of the foolish in the visible world. If he says "Yes", he will burden the substance of [light] with something it cannot bear. Therefore, [the Dualist] himself is foolish. *Strength comes from God alone.*

### [4.3. A Critique of the Naturalists]

As for the Naturalists, let us say: A natural being is compelled and cannot refrain from its nature, though every other being possessing a nature is able to prevent it from its causal action. Thus, it is established that [a natural being's] action is conditional on other [natural beings] for as long as it acts, since it can be prevented from its action by those others. [Only] if it were in isolation would it act [unimpeded] so long as that remained the case. Hence, since it is never prevented from its action, it is established that it is under the compulsion of a compelling and omniscient being.<sup>603</sup>

603 Al-Māturīdī here directs his attention towards the Naturalists (*aṣḥāb al-ṭabā'ī'*) who believed that natural objects had causal efficacy without any place for God. His aim is to show that though such objects do indeed act as causes, this requires there to be a creator. First of all, natures must, on their own, act according to their dispositional tendency, they cannot fail to do so. But they can be prevented from acting by the contrary nature of everything else. One might thereby expect that nothing would be able to occur due to the large number of blocking effects. The fact that there is order in the world, and that natural things regularly have their effects becomes, for



For a natural being to impact anything by its nature, the latter must be created with a nature that may accept this influence. For example, let us take a thing that does not get hurt: the act that hurts something else does not hurt it. The same is true for things that cause pain and pleasure, as well as dyes [that change the colors of things]. The act of the nature is not [on its own] so as to make a thing accept or conflict with it.<sup>604</sup> Through this, the existence of other than the natures [i.e., God] is established: if a natural thing were to be left alone with its action, it would neither combine [with other things] nor be shaped. The existence of things [that have been combined and shaped] indicates that these things have a creator.<sup>605</sup>

Then, if things were left amongst dyes to be painted on their own, they would come out in a corrupt and ugly form. The only one to rectify that [i.e., paint them beautifully] is a wise and omniscient agent who puts everything in its place. The same applies to the effects of the natures [that is, they can only be combined in the present arrangement by God]. In fact, [this statement] is more correct with respect to the natures because they mutually repel and move apart, or they [would] affect things without a limit, and in that is corruption. Therefore, the harmony and subsistence of bodily substances with [the natures] indicates an omniscient and compelling being who joins [natures] together and compels them. In addition, for every joining together of natures there is one [i.e., God] who bears them, [yet] does not belong to them, so that, necessarily, [the natures'] existence establishes [the bearer's existence]. We have already made convincing explanations of this kind.<sup>606</sup> We observe that heat naturally ascends, cold descends, and

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al-Māturīdī, strong evidence that there must be an omnipotent and omniscient being who has instituted the right combination of natures for the world's natural processes to seamlessly operate.

604 In K, 117 and TA, 184, there is the addition of the statement "and is affected by it (*wa-yuta'aththaru bi*)" from the margin of the manuscript to this sentence. See MS. 57v. It is not clear that the manuscript emendation is referring to this place in the text and it is grammatically awkward given the preceding conjunction "or" (*aw*). The meaning is not that the act fails to have an effect on the other object but that it does not do so except in consideration of the latter's own combination of properties.

605 Building on the point that natures need a created receptivity in those things that they are to affect, al-Māturīdī argues that for any individual object to combine with others, God must create the effect of the unique combination of effective and receptive powers that makes up that specific interaction.

606 See 2.1.2 (3), 2.2 (6) and 2.2.1.3 (4) (5).



both unite in one body. Thus, it has been established that this is through governance from an omniscient and knowledgeable compeller.

As for those who argue that bodily substances are eternal – though we observe that [such substances] are not devoid of temporals – we consider this claim impossible for the following reasons:

1) [Substances] would lack [temporals] in eternity, which means denying that to which sensation bears witness.

2) Many substances come into existence at a certain period of time. They are parts of the whole [world] and they have the same properties as the whole. Therefore, one should judge them [to be temporal]. One cannot argue that the substances have manifested after latency, or joined together after being separated, because this [claim] amounts to affirming other than the judgments of sensation. If this [claim] were deemed possible, then there could be evidence that the world originated from nothing [at all], even if that cannot be encompassed by [sensation] and its existence cannot be imagined by a human being.<sup>607</sup> The theory of latency is impossible because one thing cannot be a place for another ten times larger than it. *Strength comes from God alone.*

3) The bodily substance and its quality cannot be devoid of shape and hence cannot be free from a shaper. In fact, this is like the rest of sensed objects and their qualities, which are those which are not established in their own right, but rather by an agent who keeps them in existence. So, they cannot be eternal. *Strength comes from God alone.*

4) Everything knows its own weakness and its ignorance about its own states and what is good for it. So, that is an indication for [the world] as a whole, [along with] other proofs that have already been mentioned.

Then the Creator must be characterized by power and generosity in eternity, and likewise with creating. For everything originates in accordance with the way it was [caused by His existentiation] in eternity and this continues forever in a way that negates eternity from everything that originates through Him. This has to be so, because [temporal existence] is a kind of extinction and the meaning of existentiation is impossible for it as it

607 That is, it undermines the proponent of the eternal world's own position. Consider in light of 2.5.1 (1).



is the existentiated thing itself.<sup>608</sup> In accordance with the way that they were [existentiated], bodily substances cannot be devoid of the temporals that emerge on the basis of power and generosity. Then, the temporals lead to [other] temporals, according to their capacity. So, the same is true for bodily substances. *Strength comes from God alone.*

If the whole world were eternal, the characterization of power and action would disappear from Him with respect to the temporal [things]. On the contrary, His existentiation is that He originates everything as He knew it would be and He wills an existentiation by which He is eternally described. This is because He is exalted above [the origination] of temporals in Him. Just as [the creation] adopts the meaning of "the world", which indicates the encompassing of temporalities by it in its origination, then so would the Creator.<sup>609</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

#### 4.4. Enquiry: [The Invalidation of Monotheism by Other Groups]<sup>610</sup>

1) The Jurist Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Then, the discourse of monotheism from [each] group<sup>611</sup> [is as follows]:

i) Despite the differences amongst themselves, the Dahrīs agree on one creator or on the eternity of primordial or prime matter. [The latter] is one until accidents appear in it and it changes from its original state.

ii) The Dualists say: The Wise, Merciful and Omniscient is one. The meaning of the Other [i.e., Satan] is not that of lordship. On the contrary, it is the opposite because it is purely folly and evil.

<sup>608</sup> Temporal existence is a "kind of extinction," because it originates at a point in the temporal order but was not existent in timelessness. This is the case even if it continues in existence forever into the future. The other kind of extinction is that in which something that originated in the temporal order is extinguished. All things except God are subject to one of the two kinds of extinction, whereas both are negated from Him.

<sup>609</sup> If instances of temporal origination encompass the creator, for example in acquiring the attribute of creation, then He becomes temporal like the world (*Translator*).

<sup>610</sup> The edited Arabic editions of the text use the phrase "Enquiry [into the Paths of Monotheism (*mas'ala fi ṭuruq al-tawhīd*)]", which reflects the first sentence of the section. The alternative phrase chosen in this translation is in line with al-Māturīdī's sentiments later in the section and better captures the thrust of his argumentation.

<sup>611</sup> MS. 58r reads *ṭarīq* (path, or way), which is emended to *ṭuruq* in K, 118. This probably originally read *fariq* (group, or sect), which is used by al-Māturīdī in his comments below.



iii) The People of Religions<sup>612</sup> affirm pre-eternity for the One. But a group afterwards [i.e., the Jews] say that He is a body. Another group [i.e., the Christians] say that He has a son.

So, [the Dahrīs, the Dualists and the People of Religion] agree on the One, despite their differences. Similarly, they agree that it has no similar, because that is impossible. This is because it was [one] and there was no other, since the aspect in which similarity occurs is the existence of temporal beings other than it. And that is impossible. This is the meaning of the One, for it is one in its loftiness and majesty. It is one in essence such that it is [impossible] for it to have a similar in its essence because this nullifies oneness, as we have already explained. It is also one in attributes; transcendent above anyone sharing with it in the realities of knowledge, power and exsistence by which it is characterized. On the contrary, each of those qualities possessed by another comes from [the One] after it did not exist, with the impossibility of the temporally originated thing resembling the eternal. *Strength comes from God alone.*

2) Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: [God] granted monotheism in general to all thinking people. Then, each group of people invalidated the monotheism that was given to them in general through an interpretation. Only a group of the People of Islam remained fully committed to what He had given them.

An example of that is a group of the Dahrīs. They believe in the Creator and His eternity but consider all substances co-eternal with Him. This abolishes monotheism.

Also, whoever believes in the primordial and prime matter makes them one. Then they destroy [this one] and say that innumerable things have come from it as a result of its translocation and extinction.

And whoever from the Dualists believes in the Omniscient One says He is one in genus because they regard all goodness as His parts. This is the doctrine of such groups as the Manichaeans from the Zindiqs and Zoroastrians. Thus, they invalidate the meaning of the One by saying that He is a body, because the body is the name of whatever an increase is generated from.

612 The examples given make this seem to be equivalent to the Qur'anic category of Scriptuaries (*ahl al-kitāb*). See Harvey, *The Qur'an and the Just Society*, 100-1.

The Jews also accept that He resembles creatures, so that by it there is an increase in number [i.e., invalidating monotheism]. Their doctrine has gone as far as to say that He might have a son.<sup>613</sup>

The Christians profess that [God] is one in existence and three in persons,<sup>614</sup> negating parts and boundaries from each person. Again, according to them, He was not corporeal at first, then He was incarnated. It is known that the body is a form that is divided and fragmented.

According to the Naturalists, natures do not necessitate action by themselves, so there is a need for one to compose and split them. [This agent] is eternal according to them.

3) Another claimant of monotheism is the Mu'tazila. They believe that things are in non-existence, and the term "non-existence" admits eternity, so the same applies to things as well.<sup>615</sup> This doctrine of the Mu'tazila abolishes monotheism, as can be seen in our discussion of the doctrine of the Dahrīs on the eternity of the world.<sup>616</sup> In addition, according to the Mu'tazila, God was not the creator, gracious and merciful, then He became so through the origination of things. According to the Dualists, [light and dark] were separate in essence, then they were mixed. For the followers of prime and primordial matter, God was one in an aspect, then He entered into that state [of multiplicity] through the temporal events that originated. However, the doctrine of these parties [i.e., of prime and primordial matter] is more rationally plausible than that of the Mu'tazila. For the former considers the change [in the initial state] necessary due to [the origination]

613 This refers to Q. 9:30: "The Jews say, 'Uzayr is the Son of God'".

614 Al-Māturīdī uses the obscure word *al-qunūmā* instead of the usual *uqnūm* for "person" or "hypostasis". This seemingly puzzled past readers of the manuscript of *Kitāb al-tawhīd* with *al-qanūmāt* written in the margin and *uṣūl* (sources or foundations) underneath the word in MS. 59r. This may reflect a direct transliteration of the Syriac *qnōmā*; there was a community of Nestorian Christians in Samarqand during al-Māturīdī's lifetime, and this denomination had been popular in the broader region; see Dorroll, "The Universe in Flux," 124; Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 153. Alternatively, and perhaps more simply, it should be read *al-qunūmāt* as an unorthodox plural for *qunūm* (pl. *aqānīm*), a word that was in use within early *kalām*. See Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*, 41, n. 7, 83-84.

615 If thingness can be possessed by the non-existent, then things can be understood to have some mode of thingness prior to their emergence into existence.

616 See 2.19.



of temporals in the source. [The Mu'tazila], on the other hand, [claim a change in Him] due to [the origination] of temporals in others. Yet in the visible world, nothing leaves its [own state] because of something that does not inhere in it. *Strength comes from God alone.*

4) A second criticism is directed at al-Husayn [b. Muḥammed al-Najjār], al-Burghūth<sup>617</sup> and others on this subject because they consider change necessary due to place. This is when they say: [God] existed without place. Then, He was characterized with every place. Thus, they consider it necessary that God be described by the temporal. Therefore, this doctrine abolishes the meaning of monotheism.

The Mushabbiha say that He has a likeness to creatures in terms of corporeality, limit, end, movement and stillness, ascribing to Him those attributes with which the temporality of the world is known, arguing that they are His likeness. He is majestic above this [description].

5) So, there has arisen the [following correct] belief of a group [i.e., the People of Monotheism] about monotheism: [God] is one in essence; to Him go the needs of [each] one [of His creation]; and He is exalted above the meaning of [such] ones, which is what necessitates the quality of number, and in which are established change, destruction, limits and end. [God] is characterized by eternity, existention and power. He is majestic and mighty above change and destruction. Praise belongs to God in every state.

6) Then, the difference of opinion amongst the Dahrīs can be summarized under three points:

i) [The source of the world] was first separated and then joined. This is the view of the Zindīqs, Dualists and whoever adopts light and dark dualism.

ii) [The source] was first joined and then separated. This is the opinion of the followers of the doctrine of primordial and prime matter.

iii) [Although one of joining and separation] is eternal, it cannot be known which one it is. This may be similar to the Naturalist doctrine as that

617 Muḥammad b. 'Īsā, known as al-Burghūth (d. 240-41/855-56), was a Basran student of al-Najjār who occupied a similar theological space of dialogue and shared ideas with the Mu'tazila without being considered one of them. Al-Māturīdī only mentions him this single time in *The Book of Monotheism*. See van Ess, *Theology and Society*, Vol. 4, 184-88.

[feature] is not clear [on their account]. Then [the Naturalists say] that either separation or joining is eternal and that they see the present state of the world as based on them both. The doctrine that substances are eternal and that temporals are without a beginning relies on this. But it is an obvious contradiction to distinguish [in this way] between the two states [of separation and joining] because it necessitates that one of these two aspects, either separation or joining, is essential. For [the state in question] is characterized by eternity. Then, this [state] departs from [the world] without itself disappearing [in eternity]. So, whatever depends on [this state] is destroyed, despite the existence of the cause on which it depends. This is the situation in which a thing disappears despite the presence of the cause that brings it into existence, which is rationally corrupt. In addition, if this is considered possible, it would also be possible for the eternal to become temporal and vice versa. This invalidates their doctrine on eternity.<sup>618</sup>

7) Additionally, were it possible for the existence of the self-subsistent to perish and for the perishable in itself to self-subsist, it would be possible for the existence of the self-existent to become non-existent and for the non-existence of the non-existent in itself to exist.

In this are two aspects:

i) The being of the world after it was not and its existence after non-existence. This not only invalidates their teaching, but also necessitates acceptance of the generation of the world without a [material] source for it. *Strength comes from God alone.*

ii) If it was possible that the essentially joined could be separated and the essentially separate could be joined without any temporal generation, then it would be possible for the joined to be separate at the time that it was joined, for its essence continues to exist. This is not something that the mind can accept.

618 This argument can be summarized as follows. The idea that either a joined single substance or two separate substances can be the eternal source of the temporal world falls into contradiction. The reason for this is that such an aspect, as an essential quality in eternity, cannot ever change. Yet at the same time it does change as the initial substance shifts to its opposite (i.e., the joined separates or the separate joins) in the temporal unfolding of the world.



8) Additionally, this definitely eliminates the possibility of knowing beings other than [the source] because no knowledge indicates the others better than that which I have mentioned.<sup>619</sup> Also, this makes it possible to see the evil as good, the darkness as light, the living as dead, the moving as still, the cold as hot and so on from amongst the contraries. Hence the [posited] possibility of that invalidates the opinion of the eternity of the joined and the separate such that they exist together. [All] of this shows the corruption of the belief in the eternal world (*al-dahr*).<sup>620</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

9) Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The principle in this matter is this: When [the two initial states of the world] were separate, they were so either by nature, by choice, or by another who separates them. The same is the case for joining. Then, separation and mixing are subject to [one of the three options] we have mentioned:

i) If [the alleged two initial states of the world] are such by nature, they must increase due to its source being ever-growing separation or joining. As one may see, the motion of everything that naturally moves increases more and more, and such is only appropriate. Likewise, every substance that naturally ascends has a higher position and [ascends more and more], whereas that which descends by its nature [descends more and more]. Therefore, the joining of these two is forever impossible. The same holds true of two things, one of which moves to the right and the other to the left. And this refutes what they say [that the two initial states of the world were separate or joined by nature].

ii) If [the two alleged initial states are joined or separated] by choice, it is false to say that they used to have a state that is different from the present one, because there is no evidence to prove a state that is different from the visible world. [What is meant by evidence] is the occurrence of joining along with one whose choice is to separate, or the occurrence of separation

619 The knowledge that the essentially joined cannot separate is certain rational knowledge. If it can be incorrect, then *a fortiori* all other knowledge about entities is less secure.

620 After showing that taking either separation or joining as the material source of the world (or being undecided between them), leads to contradiction, al-Māturīdī shows that it cannot be both at once. At this point, all logical options for a material source have been exhausted and any position relying on this idea has been refuted.



with one whose choice is to join. Since this evidence is not available, the option of choice is refuted.<sup>621</sup> In addition, their view that each of [the two initial states] endures and is imprisoned by the substance of the other is refuted.<sup>622</sup> The evidence for this is that the confinement of good in evil is evil. Second, if the two [states in question] have choice, each would have power to prevent the other from acting, choosing that [act], and knowing its howness. If they do not [have this power], choice loses its meaning, and incapacity and ignorance occur in [both states]. If they have [this power to prevent the other], the idea that the [two initial states] may diverge from their [present state] is invalid, because in this case the two principles will reach what will hurt and harm them [because each will prevent the other from its action, from knowing the nature of its action and from choosing it]. If this is acknowledged to be true, each of them renders the other ignorant and incapacitated. Therefore, the opinion is also invalid. *Strength comes from God alone.*

10) If this [separation] is due to another, the temporality of separation and differentiation has been established. The two [states in question] cannot be free from separation. Therefore, they must be temporal. This secures the demonstration of monotheism through [an argument] that has been used to eliminate monotheism. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Whoever knows neither the joining nor separation of the [two initial states] accepts that he has nothing to say, that he is one of those whose intellect cannot attain knowledge, and that his method is only traditional authority. [This] is obscure for [such a person] due to the differences in what is conveyed to him [i.e., knowledge]. [Such a person] only speaks according to what one has received and [thinks] that what has been conveyed to him is a truth that makes [things] evident according to it.<sup>623</sup>

621 This deals with the scenario in which the dual initial state of either separation or joining is an internal choice. It is argued that there is no evidence that the state presently observed in the visible world was originally anything else (which would be required by the position). The criteria mentioned for such evidence is that despite the given initial choice, the opposite result is now found; for instance, a choice of initial separation has now changed to joining. The choices of the human agent, assuming all else is equal, are efficacious. Therefore, the relevant evidence is not present, and the initial state could not be the choice of agents.

622 See 2.5.3 (2-3).

623 See al-Māturīdī's Introduction.



Then, since gathering together the two [initial states, i.e., joining and separation] is impossible due to what we have explained about contradiction, it is established that were the truth to be in what the Dahrīs say, it would have to be in one of the two views. Yet we have explained the corruption of each of them. *Help is from God.*

#### [4.5. The Doctrine of Muḥammad b. Shabīb on the Existence and Attributes of the Creator]

1) Muḥammad b. Shabīb<sup>624</sup> said on that topic [of the initial states of the world], something with the following meaning according to us:

i) Since the thing that exists depends upon contrariness and conflict, then this is perpetually the case. Therefore, its [self-generation as joined] is negated. For if the existence of a thing within a totality cannot be imagined except that there is a thing of which it is part, then each constituent being acts to restrict its existence, so it is nullified. It is like the person who says: "No one should enter this house until another enters it." If this condition is fulfilled, no one can enter the house.<sup>625</sup>

ii) Or [the world] exists due to a preceding separation. Thus, existence is nullified because of contrariness, as it is the due right for two contrary things to repel one another by nature. If it were possible for the two to exit from their contrary natures by choice – and contrariness requires what I mentioned [i.e., separation] – it would be possible [for each of them] to choose its own destruction, even if by its nature it would endure. Since both options are refuted, it has been established that [the world] exists due to the one who originated it after it did not exist, along with the difference and harmony inherent to it. *Strength comes from God alone.*

On the other hand, no temporally originated thing is without an originator:

<sup>624</sup> Muḥammad b. Shabīb was a third/ninth century student of al-Nazzām and considered by al-Māturidī a Mu'tazilī, though it is possibly better to connect him with the semi-Mu'tazilis and Murji'is from whom he drew materials for his systematic *kalām*. It seems that Ibn Shabīb may have provided the model for al-Māturidī's summa with his own *Kitāb al-tawhīd*. See van Ess, *Theology and Society*, Vol. 4, 141-48; Rudolph, *Al-Māturidī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 226-30.

<sup>625</sup> If there is nothing but conflict between constituent parts, then the world cannot exist and sustain at all.

- a) because non-existence and existence are one for it;
- b) because a shape is not known without a shaper; and
- c) because the seasons change from summer to winter etc. Therefore, it has been established that [the world, which has this feature of seasonal change] exists due to [an originator].

2) The following objection has been raised [to Ibn Shabīb]: If the generation of the world at a certain time prevents it from existing on its own, why should this not prevent it from existing through another? [i.e., God]. He [Ibn Shabīb] claims: If it exists through another, the governance of its existence aims for a religious or worldly benefit. If it exists not through another, it will not do so. Therefore, [its existence through itself and through another] is different.

i) This claim of [Ibn Shabīb] requires that the first creatures be liable for testing for [a religious or worldly interest] to obtain for them. Since it is possible for beings other than [those which are liable for testing] to exist at a certain time without any benefit, this statement of Ibn Shabīb has no meaning.<sup>626</sup> In fact, we have already explained that the world has been created, but one cannot ask why it has been created.<sup>627</sup> We cannot claim that He only does what is most beneficial, so the due right of the action is required for Him, such that if He delays or brings forward [the action], He will be characterized with blame. On the contrary, since God Most High is wise, His actions do not depart from wisdom. When it comes to considering what is most beneficial for another, what is meant by this is not whether the act itself is the most appropriate, but whether it is a right and an obligation upon Him. When there is no other, it is impossible for the other to have a right over Him. [Rather], the question ["Why did God create the world?"] concerns all creatures. Therefore, the claim that He created creatures for their own benefit is meaningless because there is no harm or defect for them in whatever He failed to create for them. So, the reason for the creation of creatures is that which has been explained. *God knows best.*

<sup>626</sup> Al-Māturīdī only requires there to be a teleology in which eventually creatures are brought forth for testing, not that this is the case in the first moment. Moreover, he thinks it is possible that such initial entities exist without any attendant religious or worldly benefit.

<sup>627</sup> See 3.1 (1), further confirming this view as al-Māturīdī's own.



ii) Then, in general, every creature certainly benefits from being tested and derives admonitions that are attained through inference and contemplation. Other benefits that He bestows on the beings liable to testing are excepted from this. *God alone leads to success.*

iii) The source of benefit for the servant in religion lies in his actions, and likewise [in the case] of his corruption. God Most High has bestowed the greatest bounties and blessings on the human being through the causes by which the beneficial action is obtained. As for one who does wrong, this is because he turns away from Him and prefers his own desire to His obedience. God does not prevent the servant from reaching what he has chosen for himself. This is where [the servant] prefers his own caprice to His command, his own desire to His obedience, and the act that has been explained to be an act of enmity, to the act of alliance. *Strength comes from God alone.*

3) [Ibn Shabīb] was given an objection concerning the first creature [God] created for its own sake and without any benefit.<sup>628</sup> [Ibn Shabīb] claimed that there has never been a time about which one may ask, "Why did not God create before it?" Therefore, whenever creation takes place, then it is the first time and, it is the most beneficial for governance and the best for wisdom. When this is the case, the question becomes: Why did God not create what is less than [the world] in wisdom and beautiful governance?<sup>629</sup>

i) The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: What [Ibn Shabīb] mentions about the time [of the creation of the world] is correct, because such a question is corrupt. This is because one cannot indicate to a time [before the beginning of creation], otherwise there would be a creation before that until more possible times than is conceivable in language.<sup>630</sup> This proves that the question is false, unless [the creation] is eternal. But this is contradictory because it is impossible for existentionation to occur for the universe in eternity.<sup>631</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

<sup>628</sup> In 4.5 (2) i, above.

<sup>629</sup> If the first question is blocked, and there cannot be an earlier time, then according to Ibn Shabīb it may still be asked if God can create a less wise world.

<sup>630</sup> Al-Māturīdī is pointing out the meaninglessness of there being a time before the first time of creation, agreeing with Ibn Shabīb. If it were possible, it would lead to an infinite regress and an invalid past-eternal world. This aligns well with al-Māturīdī's position of divine timelessness.

<sup>631</sup> If existentionation is bringing the universe into existence from nothing, then according



ii) What [Ibn Shabīb] says about wisdom is a reality. But I do not know what he intends by what he calls "the most beneficial". The terms "less than it" or "its similar" have no meaning [regarding the world that God creates] because God Most High can do any deed that does not fall outside wisdom, since departing from wisdom realizes folly, which abolishes lordship. Then, there are two paths in wisdom: justice and benevolence. There is no end to the benevolence that He may do, such that it is said about Him in something that He acts to realize his power by what is most benevolent. Also, He does not have to confer benefit, but selects whomsoever He wants for it.

iii) For the reason I have mentioned, it is impossible that His action departs from wisdom. Likewise, the meaning of justice is "placing everything in its proper place." But there are degrees to describe His action. Some of the [degrees] are excellence and benevolence, while others are justice and wisdom. For these two [i.e., justice and wisdom] are two general names for every deed performed by the agent [i.e., God]. But the first one [i.e., benevolence] is special because He can abandon it or do it as an extra favor. *Strength comes from God alone.*

The question of whether He has power to create a thing before this creation should be answered based on our explanation of time.<sup>632</sup> *God has power over all things.*

4) [Ibn Shabīb] was given the objection: "Why has [God] not created things from eternity?" He replied with his previous point: "Due to the falsity of the idea that one thing may exist before another *ad infinitum*."

i) Shaykh Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: In our opinion, the following should be said in response: If what you mean by your statement: "He creates things from eternity" is that it existed in eternity, this is impossible because this renders things eternal, and their being eternal abolishes their temporal generation. However, if you mean by it that each of the things is created [in eternity to generate] at the time of its existence, then this is true because He is essentially a creator and not through anyone else.

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to al-Māturīdī's rejection of a past-eternal temporal regress, it cannot have its outcome in eternity, since the world would be eternally present in existence.

632 This reflects al-Māturīdī's strict negation of temporal sequence of any kind for God. One cannot ask a question about temporal precedence prior to the creation of the world because it is an incoherent idea.



ii) In this context, let us touch upon Muḥammad b. Shabīb's answers to the questions of the atheists. He answered [the following question] about the One whom he worships: "What is He?" We have already explained the answer to this question.<sup>633</sup> [Ibn Shabīb] claims: [The question of "What is He?"] raises the possibility that there is a likeness for Him. However, we have explained that there is no likeness for Him and set forth the following points: It is possible to indicate to Him, because we do not know Him through our senses. [The expression] "What is He?" is a meaning generated beforehand through evidence and the attestation of the world. Again, by "What is He?" [is meant:] "What is His name?" The answer is "God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful."

iii) In our opinion, this [the answer to "What is He?"] is as follows: "He is God, the One, and nothing is like Him." By this statement we block the way for the question to be repeated, because it is based on [sensations and] what is conceived in the imagination. In this is His negation except with respect to [His] existence on the basis of evidence. *Strength comes from God alone.*

5) Then, Ibn Shabīb answered the question "Where is He?" as follows: God is in things, not in the sense of indwelling in them, but in the sense of managing them. This is as it is said: "So-and-so is in his action", and [Ibn Shabīb] added: "He is not in things in such a way as to be encompassed by them."

i) The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: Ibn Shabīb erred in response. On the contrary, [this question] should be answered as follows: You are asking about His place, whereas He exists without place, and He is exalted above being characterized by places. Rather, He exists without changing and disappearing. However, to say that He exists "in action", in terms of linguistic convention, means that God is busy with a task that prevents Him from anything else. God is exalted above this description.<sup>634</sup>

6) Then, [the following question] has been asked to [Ibn Shabīb]: "You have negated the similarity of Him to creatures and the similarity of

633 See 3.6 (1).

634 Even though the context is negation of place, al-Māturīdī's response also negates time from God in terms of both change and succession.



creatures to Him. So, you have made a similarity [in terms of dissimilarity in both directions].” He replied: This is negation, and no similarity occurs in negation. For example, when we say, “Black and white are dissimilar”, the dissimilarity of the two does not require a similarity because similarity obtains only in affirmation.

i) What [Ibn Shabīb] says is good. Also, if a similarity occurred [in the context of negation], the phrase, “This is similar to it” would necessitate difference. This would turn upside down literal meanings and would do away with metaphor in its entirety. In summary, negation removes what is negated from the imagination and intellect. When it disappears, [the intellect and imagination] can no longer determine it. However, similarity falls under a certain bodily substance, attribute or boundary. Therefore, by that [negation] the meaning of similarity has been nullified.<sup>635</sup>

ii) A similar answer is given to one who makes the following claim: “If you do not characterize God as being in place, you will limit Him, and the limit is the end of place. While He is qualified by limitation, it is impossible to negate the limitation. The same is the case with places.”<sup>636</sup> In contrast to this claim, what really limits Him is the one who says that He is in all places or in a certain place to the exclusion of others, because he affirms Him by affirming the place attributed to Him from [the category of place] determined by the intellect and imagination. This results in limiting Him and comparing Him to others. *Strength comes from God alone.*

7) Ibn Shabīb also answered the following question, “How did God create creatures?” [as follows:] If one who asks this question means [that He created] by an act of manufacturing, this is impossible; on the contrary, He originated [the creatures from nothing] and generated their substances without manufacturing. If [this person] intended: “Which thing did He create?”, substances such as the sky are indicated, because the creation of something [the act of creation] according to [Ibn Shabīb’s] claim is that

635 Al-Māturīdī supports Ibn Shabīb’s response to the objection that by negating God from similarity with creatures and vice versa, there is a type of similarity. His argument is that the negation of similarity inherently removes God from all bodily determination, which is essential to the meaning of similarity between things in the visible world.

636 The idea of the opponent seems to be that by not characterizing God with a place, one by default places Him at the end of all defined places, which acts as a limitation that He cannot remove.



thing itself. If by this he means, "Why did He create?", then [Ibn Shabīb answers:] for the benefit their religion receives from the creation and what is most beneficial for them in matters that He has made them responsible for.

The Jurist (may God have mercy on him) said: The answer to this question is to reject it by saying that there is not "how" to His act because everything with a how has similars. Also, there is a difference of opinion over whether the creation of something is the same as [the thing] or other than it. In fact, some argue that a thing and its creation are identical, and [Ibn Shabīb] adopts this view. So, the question [of how God creates] is corrupt according to his teaching because [the thing] is nothing other than its creation, so it exemplifies it. Some say: the creation of something is His attribute by which He is characterized in eternity. Therefore, inquiring about its howness is like inquiring about the howness of His essence, knowledge and power, which is corrupt.

8) Ibn Shabīb was asked: "Did He create things from something or from nothing?" He answered as follows: "He did not create things from something." This means that He originated things without a source. This is also included in his statement that bodily objects have been generated. However, according to the teaching of the Mu'tazila, the thingness [i.e., essence] of things was not realized by Him; on the contrary, their existence was realized by Him. Therefore, in line with their doctrine, it is impossible that things could be created from nothing. Rather, He did not create things, but brought their substances from non-existence into existence while they were things in non-existence. This makes [the Mu'tazila] similar to the Dahrīs. Praise is due to God, who has saved us from that fate!

i) His answer to the question [of why] God [created creatures] is strange: "He created creatures to benefit them." He was asked, "Why did God create?", and answered, "For the benefit of creatures." Well, why did God create [creatures] to benefit themselves? What need did the creatures have when they did not exist, so that He would create them for their own benefit? If it is permissible to say, "God created creatures for their own benefit without a need", how did he not create [them] for His own benefit even without a need for them? This is more in conformity to [Ibn Shabīb's] doctrine, because [he argues that] He is not eternally creative, gracious and

merciful, and these are merely names of exaltation and praise. It is as if, according to the Mu'tazila, God benefited from creatures, as He was not such in His essence, and then became so by His creation. God is exalted above the attributes of dependence and benefitting. *Strength comes from God alone.*

ii) The Jurist (may God have mercy on him) said: As for [Ibn Shabīb's] statement, "The creation [of a thing] is the thing itself." Has the thing [originated] due to the essence of God or due to its own essence? If nothing is from God except His own essence and nothing from Him reaches the creation beside its own essence, how can He be a creator when nothing has come from Him other than the creatures and the [act of] creation is nothing but them? Why should not the creatures be more worthy of being the creator than He is? [This question is to the point] because the only thing that reaches the creatures from Him is their existence. On the other hand, the fact that a thing is eternal does not necessitate that another originates from it, unless something reaches the latter from the former through which the latter will originate. If this is the case in the visible world, how does [Ibn Shabīb] regard it as necessary in the unseen?

iii) To [the question], "How did He create?", his answer, "He did not create by manufacturing" and his other statements are meaningless, because he was not asked about what did not occur. On the contrary, he was asked about the howness of His action. So, his statement, "He did not manufacture" is meaningless. [For Ibn Shabīb], since the creation of a thing is the same as the thing itself, he should have only mentioned the thing as an answer, and he should not have divided the question and then negated the meaning that is understood from "How?" in the question. *Strength comes from God alone.*

9) [Ibn Shabīb] has answered the following objection: If [God] is eternally hearing and seeing, why do you not say, "He is eternally creating"? In response, [Ibn Shabīb] claims that it would necessitate the generation of creatures in eternity and that by the expression, "He is eternally hearing" he means the negation of deafness and likewise in respect of being the Omniscient, the Seeing. He argues that he has said, "The Creator is eternal", but he has avoided saying, "[He is eternally] creating" because of [the aforementioned problem].



i) The Jurist (may God have mercy on him) said: If [Ibn Shabīb] only means by "[God] is eternally hearing, seeing and knowing" that He is not ignorant, blind and deaf, it will be more appropriate to say that openly, because this will better prevent confusion. For one may say about a thing, "It is neither ignorant, nor powerless, nor deaf", but this does not require that the thing in question be qualified by attributes "powerful, knowing, hearing, seeing." If there is nothing in [the phrase "[God] is eternally hearing, seeing and knowing"] other than negation, then a specific phrase of negation expresses the point better than a phrase that provides no benefit if understood; on the contrary, it causes all kinds of harm. In addition, if [Ibn Shabīb] by that [phrase] only means to negate the opposites [that is, if he only means that He is not deaf, blind and ignorant], let him say: "[God] is healthy, sound and free from illness" in order to negate the opposites without affirming the aforementioned meaning [i.e., He is hearing, seeing and knowing]. If this is impossible, it has become clear that [Ibn Shabīb's] claim to explain the occurrence that he mentioned [i.e., the above objection that God should be attributed with eternal existention] is delusion.<sup>637</sup>

ii) On the other hand, the fact that successive actions occur in a beautiful and perfect manner indicates that they are known, and they lie within the scope of power, but it does not indicate one who is non-ignorant and non-powerless. This is because from a nobody, as [Ibn Shabīb] describes [God], absolutely no action and no harmony emerges, for example all the [varieties] of accidents. *Strength comes from God alone.*

iii) Since the divine names are derived from the attributes, when the latter are negated, so are the former. If the divine attributes are not accepted as real, then the divine names become nicknames. When this is the case, the statement that He has eternally been possessed of these attributes becomes meaningless, due to the impossibility of a nickname existing in eternity. *Strength comes from God alone.*

637 The point here is to deny Ibn Shabīb the option to make use of nullifications of the attributes instead of affirming God's eternal existention. The strategy is to make him concede that a positive statement of God being sound works equally well to reject the negative meanings of deafness and blindness. But then this formulation does not allow him to explain away scriptural statements, such as hearing and seeing, which then leads to the objection: why not affirm God as creating?



iv) However, to say that [God] is hearing, knowing and powerful does not necessitate that every known, accomplishable and heard thing be actually like this in eternity. So, the same is the case in the statement about the creator, but He is the creator of things, so they emerge according to what they are. Likewise, He is knowing about them, powerful over them, and so on. When the [Qur'anic] statement "knowing, hearing and seeing" and "the Omniscient, the Hearing, the Seeing" are one [in meaning], then so are creator and the creator. In fact, as far as the statement is considered, the term "the creator" is more appropriate for requiring the eternity of the creatures than the term "a creator". Cannot he see that with the form "creator", it is said, "Master of the Day of Judgment" and "creator of everything", which includes everything temporal and subsistent. The term "the creator" does not have this [meaning] and this is not customary usage.<sup>638</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

10) Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The principle is that the only way to know God Most High is the indication of the world to Him due to the interruption of the ways to reach the knowledge of Him through the senses. Alternatively, this knowledge can be obtained through the witness of the tradition. In addition, the visible world indicates to Him by bearing witness to the attribute, not the entity. This is because existence following non-existence is evidence for the origination by which the originator is known. The diversity of the states of the visible world and the joining of contraries in one thing is evidence of His might. The effective and harmonious governance by a strong ruler and the lack of disharmony occurring to the intellect despite the multiplicity of the external world is evidence of the rational knowledge through which the world is known. There is nothing in the sensible world that points to an entity while negating the attribute. It is not possible to affirm an entity without realizing the attributes, as this is not the way in which sensation bears witness. Similarly, the testimony of people whose veracity has been established by evidence [i.e., the messengers] has brought [a conception of] the Omniscient, the

638 Al-Māturīdī's position is that the terms "the creator" and "a creator" can be used interchangeability in their Qur'anic context. Just on purely linguistic terms, however, the latter is more suitable for temporal things.



Hearing, the Seeing due to mention of knowledge, power and so on, and the knowledge that these names are the names of attributes.

Thereupon, it is impossible that He might be described as being in a place, exiting, entering, connecting, disconnecting and distancing, etc. These states are negated, and without affirming and realizing what is expressed [i.e., the binary opposite]. The same applies to joining, separation, motion and stillness. Therefore, what is suggested by [Ibn Shabīb] is impossible.<sup>639</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Since the temporality of the world is established and its existence after non-existence cannot possibly happen like the generation of later things from former ones and [to occur] by accident, it is known that the world exists due to knowledge about it. Then, it is impossible that a sense by which things are known would exist without the sensible, or an analogy without a basis. So, it has been established that He is essentially knowing. With respect to the knowledge possessed by the essence of the one knowing, it is the same whether the thing known is present or absent [i.e., in temporal existence]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

11) Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The principle in this matter is what I have mentioned: [God] is not known by the senses; yet in what is known by the senses, there is evidence that He knows [the world], because He made it in such a way as to indicate Himself. Then, it is not possible that His knowledge of [the world] belongs to another, as there is not another until He creates it. Then, that creation is evidence for Him, affirming that prior to its existence He was knowledgeable about it. And there is no other to [the world] – other than [God] – who knows it. This establishes that He is essentially knowing not through another. *God alone leads to success.*

12) [Ibn Shabīb] asked himself questions about certain things with no purpose other than causing difficulties. In fact, the due right in answering questions with the purpose of causing difficulties is to discipline

<sup>639</sup> For instance, just as saying, "He is not qualified by exiting" does not mean, "He is qualified by entering", saying, "He is hearing" does not mean, "He is not deaf" (Translator).

[someone] to prevent them acting like this, as we have explained about the Sophist, not to provide a demonstration through proof. For example, he asked about God: "Does not He have power over everything?" In response, he said, "Yes, [He has]". Then he said: "Can He then put the world in an egg?" He replied with the contradiction that this requires making the egg wider than [the world], whereas He has made [the egg] narrower than the [world], because it is part of [the world]. Likewise, this is the interpretation of the smaller and larger [in general].

The Jurist (may God have mercy on him) said: The answer according to us is if he intended with what he said to keep the egg as part of the world, it is impossible because [this assumption] requires that the part turn into the whole and the whole turn into the part without the change of their state, which is a contradiction. If he intended by the egg other than an egg from the world, such that [the world] was made inside it, this has two aspects: one is that [the egg and the world] remain as they are. This is impossible for the reason Muḥammad b. Shabīb has mentioned. If what he intends by this is the minimization of the world or the enlargement of the egg, so that what he describes fits inside it, He has the power to do that. *God alone leads to success.*

The author of the book [i.e., Ibn Shabīb] adopted the sect of the Mu'tazila,<sup>640</sup> according to which God is not able to create the actions of the gnat and that which is greater than it of the substances.<sup>641</sup> All their actions occur due to [their own] power or a power possessed by other than Him. Thus, the Mu'tazila refused to accept that He is omnipotent with regard to most of what is rationally possible. Therefore, it is meaningless to oppose such people with what is rationally impossible. *Strength comes from God alone.*

13) Then, [Ibn Shabīb] asks himself: Is He able to create a similar of Himself? He replies: This is impossible because this requires a creature and, whereas the creature is originated, He is eternal. Therefore, it cannot be similar to Him. He asks the same question about power [i.e., can He create a power like His own power?] Like the first question, this is also impossible.

<sup>640</sup> This is likely to have been Ibn Shabīb's own *Book of Monotheism*. See Pessagno, *The Reconstruction of the Thought of Muḥammad Ibn Shabīb*, 450.

<sup>641</sup> An allusion to Q. 2:26: "God is not shy from striking the similitude of a gnat and that which is greater than it."



He also says: [The assumption that He creates a similar of Himself or His power] requires affirming a created thing, which is either a body that involves the traces of His creation or an accident that cannot originate by itself and indicates that it is temporal. However, He is not similar to either of them. [Ibn Shabīb] said: Besides, every originated thing is perishable, yet [what is supposed to have been created by Him in the likeness of Himself] is exalted above annihilation because it is meant to be a thing that is impossible to perish [i.e., God]. In addition, while time is impossible for other than [the supposed similar, i.e., it is impossible for God], it is the opposite for that [supposed similar, which is temporal].

The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: Whoever reflects carefully on the statements of [Ibn Shabīb] notices that the questioner has deviated from the habits of speaking about what is rationally possible to be established because he has asked: "Can He create a similar of Himself?" That which is His [supposed] similar is not body, accident, temporal or perishable, for had it one of these features, it would not be like Him. But [Ibn Shabīb] has asked by [assuming such a similar]. So, how can what he mentions remain? What he mentions [i.e., body and accident etc.] are parts that negate the existence of the similar. *Strength comes from God alone.*

14) In fact, we have spoken about the Mu'tazila in clearer terms [above]. However, a criticism may be directed at them from another angle. This is that they characterize God with power over lying, folly and injustice, such that were one of these [characteristics] in Him, His lordship would be false. Then, it is impermissible that He commit them for that reason [i.e., the invalidation of lordship]. Therefore, [Ibn Shabīb] should say: He can create a similar to Himself, but He does not. This is because making the temporal eternal, the perishable imperishable and removing the effect of creation from what bears this effect is surprising only if making the Eternal temporal, the Permanent perishable and the Wise foolish is surprising. Hence, if [performing the things in the second group] lies within the scope of power, though it is impossible to do them in actuality, then the things in the first group are also subject to the same rule according to the doctrine of the Mu'tazila.<sup>642</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

642 The argument here is that, according to the Mu'tazila, God has the power, for exam-

In light of our teaching, it is easy to [explain] the impossibility [that He create a similar of Himself]. That is to say, it is impossible that God, Mighty and Majestic, is the object of power. Therefore, with respect to the [alleged] doctrine that [something] can be other than an object of [His] power such that it becomes His similar, similarity is negated from Him because it is impossible that He come under power, and [so] the other is admitted to His service by it. *Strength comes from God alone.*

If you want, you may say: The question is contradictory because he has said, "Is He able to create His similar?" and His similar cannot be a creature. Therefore, with this statement, it is as if he said: "Is He able [to create] one who has no similar from the creatures?" Yes, indeed!

If it were possible that another was as He is [that is, His similar], then His selfhood would be abolished, so that other would be the being through which the selfhood of things exists. *Strength comes from God alone.*

15) The principle is that the divinity of God, exalted is He, has been established by the fact that He is exalted above similar and [therefore created] thingness.<sup>643</sup> Therefore, it is impossible that there be for Him a similar that would abolish His divinity.

In terms of the aspect by which [Ibn Shabīb] speaks, the statement ["Can He create a similar of Himself?"] is contradictory because it informs that [the supposed similar] is made, hence it is transformed into a "made thing". But the existence of a "made maker" is impossible due to the removal of the making by which it exists, leading thereby to its disappearance. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Also, according to the doctrine [of the Mu'tazila], He was not a creator, then He became a creator. Thus, in this respect, [Ibn Shabīb] subjected Him to the power through which He became a creator. So, how does he

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ple, to perform acts of folly, He just never does. Thus, He can make Himself, the Wise, foolish. But if that is the case, then He should be able to alter other metaphysical necessities: to make Himself lose His own status as eternal, or to create a similar to Himself. Al-Māturīdī's own position is that God's wisdom is an essential attribute and as such, does not come under the scope of His power.

643 Thingness simpliciter just means isness, or existence, as established above. Therefore, this should be read as transcendence from the thingness of created things, which is the contingency of body and accident.



deny the possibility that He was not [a creator], then He became one by creating [the creation] in this manner? In fact, He has become [a creator] by creating another. *It is only from God that help is sought.*

16) Then, [Ibn Shabīb] was asked [the following question] about God: Did He have power to create things before He created them? [Ibn Shabīb] claims, "Yes, He did." His evidence is that [God] being powerless is forbidden.<sup>644</sup> Hence, the existence of the originated thing shows His power. If He is essentially powerful, and not by power that appears [upon the origination of creatures], then He is described by the power to create the world and its like without count.

The Jurist (may God have mercy on him) said: The following is said to [Ibn Shabīb]: If He is powerful by Himself, and not through an accidental power, how can you claim that He is able to create all the motions and stillnesses of His servants up until He gives them power over [those actions]? Hence, when He gives them power, His own power disappears unless He takes it back. So, this describes [the distinction between] essential or accidental power. Whoever that describes [i.e., essential power], then to attribute to him power by which an action is not realized is impossible. And as for one whose power is liable to disappear, then attributing essential power to him is impossible according to their teaching.

What I intend by mentioning the words of the Mu'tazila, although I do not need to do so, is to make clear to anyone who uses his mind that it is impossible to establish monotheism and to eliminate the objections of the heretics with their teaching. [Instead,] the true doctrine of monotheism is that of the others [i.e., the People of Monotheism]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

17) Then, [Ibn Shabīb] claimed that the power of every agent with power precedes its action and occurs due to another, such that it changes from state to state, and its essence may change and disappear. [In response to this claim, we say:] God, exalted is He, has power by Himself over things and acts. So, what [Ibn Shabīb] has said about this matter is false. *Strength comes from God alone.* We have already explained [this] more effectively in

644 That is, if He had not had power earlier, He could not have had it later and no creature would have arisen (*Translator*).

what has preceded. *God alone leads to success.* There is a sign in this [doctrine] of making [God's] essence a knower [i.e., rejecting a distinct attribute of knowledge]. We have already demonstrated the delusion of this doctrine.

18) Then, [Ibn Shabīb] was asked about His creation of things when there is neither benefit in it for Him nor does He do it in vain. He claimed that [God] created [things] to display the eternal reward, which is a wisdom. Therefore, His action is meant as a benefit for His creatures, and not for a motive that precedes them. So, His creation is like the construction of buildings and various things that are generated by the servants.

Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: We have already explained the response to this statement. That is, it is impossible to ask about the motive [for creating], because no one can have authority over Him, or for His action to depart from wisdom, such that we can question it.<sup>645</sup>

Thereupon, the [above] question is about acquaintance with the wisdom of lordship. However, the due right of His lordship over us is that we should know Him, know His due right and command, uphold what is required from us obeying and glorifying Him, and be prepared to answer for everything we say and do. And this keeps us busy from seeking to find a reason for His action or from trying to find answers to one who asks questions about those issues in which he goes beyond his limits and turns away from the shortcomings of his own actions for which he will be held responsible. *Strength comes from God alone.*

19) [Ibn Shabīb's] statement: "He has created creatures for their own benefit", with the benefit being what he mentions, [i.e., to let them know the eternal reward,] is a digression from answering because he was asked about the creation of [all] things and those he mentioned are just a category of the whole [i.e., the beings liable to testing, the human being and the jinn]. Therefore, this [statement] entails a digression from the answer.

The attitude of the Qadarīs is also considered in this category insofar as they are asked about the creation of human actions. They have resorted to disbelief and sin [as creations of the human being] in their answer.<sup>646</sup>

<sup>645</sup> See 3.1 (1).

<sup>646</sup> To see the commonality between the two positions, consider that the beings liable for testing are a fraction of the total creatures that exist. Ibn Shabīb has concluded



This [doctrine] is false, because the way of knowing this [i.e., attribution of sin to human beings] is traditional, whereas the first thing mentioned [i.e., that the actions of servants are created by God] is rational.<sup>647</sup>

The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: For us, the principle is that God Most High only created a creation upon which the traces of His blessings are clear; the evidence of His generosity is plain; His wisdom with that which it comprises of the indications of His oneness is present; the proof of His sovereignty and operation of His will in [creation] is realized; the sign of His power and His knowledge of the realities of things is not hidden in that. As for questions, [such as,] "Why have You given blessings? Why have you made Your generosity manifest? Why is there wisdom? Why do you establish the evidence of Your oneness?", until the end of what [Ibn Shabīb] mentions, they are impossible, corrupt, unreasonable and unacceptably repugnant. So, this kind of question is nullified. *God alone leads to success.*

Then, it can be said: Since He is essentially generous, powerful and knowing, He was generous to His creation through His creation when creating it and powerful so as to be generous and show His gifts. The principle of those questions [above] according to us is corrupt and this question is false because we make the act from the essence,<sup>648</sup> and [for us] He is eternally qualified by it. Therefore, the question in relation to [the act, e.g., "Why has He done this?"] is like the question, "Why is He a knowing Lord?" *Strength comes from God alone.*

#### 4.6. Enquiry: [Defense of Reflection as a Means of Knowledge]

1) One group has said: It is safest to abandon reflection because one who reflects cannot be sure of reaching the truth. Second, [reflection] opens the door to evidence that goes against oneself. But if one refrains from

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that the purpose of God's creation of the creatures is to benefit those who will be rewarded. Reflecting on sin and evil, which are part of humanity's actions, the Qadaris concluded that it is not God who created them. So, the two approaches are common in being fragmentary.

647 It is not possible for there to be a conflict between these two sources. Thus, the genuine responsibility of human beings for their sinful actions must be established alongside the rational necessity that God is the creator of everything.

648 Reading *naj' alu al-fi'l huwa al-dhāt* on MS. 67v as *naj' alu al-fi'l min al-dhāt*.



[reflection], he will be safe from destruction. That is, if one had not reflected, then the means for what he thought to be [true] or false would not have occurred, so that the evidence of God could bind him [according to the logic of the reflection]. This is because, by thinking and researching, one wants to be compelled to the knowledge that the truth lies in what he has discovered. Additionally, in the matter of the command and prohibition, the ideas of the Gracious can resemble the ideas of Satan, yet by leaving reflection and research one is safe from this [danger]. For in that case what compels him to differentiate does not become clear to him, and what prompts him to investigate does not come to his mind. *Strength comes from God alone.*

2) [On the other hand], one who considers reflection and research to be necessary says: Abandoning [reflection] inevitably leads to destruction. For the fact that reflection is necessary is not the result of another reflection that precedes it, but the result of that through which reflection and research happen. This is the intellect by which one knows good and evil; his superiority over the rest of animals; and the way to govern people's affairs. In addition, the idea of one's disintegration and destruction comes to the intellect due to the pleasure attained from life, the desire for permanence embedded in oneself, and the great pain of the means of death were they to befall him. Therefore, one must search to attain what is most agreeable and to preserve for himself the most pleasurable and desirable things. One's intellect does not allow him to risk his life by trying everything without taking on the means to become acquainted with what is harmful, so he will be protected from it, and what is beneficial, so he can procure it. [He does this] either by looking to meet someone upon whose words he can rely and from whom he is safe from deception in that which he shows him, hence he proceeds in all of that [i.e., in harm and benefit] based on his opinion; or, he tests a thing with a small sample that will not kill him, and makes a decision by seeing the result. Thus, in both matters [i.e., reports and sensation] research is necessary. In addition, due to the desires that are embedded in his nature and the pleasures towards which his ego drives him, his ignorance distracts him from the unpleasant things and pain that afflict him, and what urges him to examine the state of his soul: How has he become like this? Has it always been like this? In what way has this happened? One cannot rid oneself of some thoughts that prevent him from abandoning reflection



over the state of his soul. [This is so] he comes to know his beginnings and whether his present state is due to himself or whether he has attained it thanks to one who has control over his soul. He should also know the things that rectify and spoil [the state of his soul], as well as the blessings he receives and the things he is protected from. In all these, reflection is necessary, and evidence is required. *God alone leads to success.*

3) One knows with certainty that whatever seduces him to abandon reflection is the idea of Satan. This is because it bars him from the fruit of his intellect and makes him frightened of the divine gift by which he takes his opportunity and attains [his] goal. The proof of this is that using intellect is realized by thinking about things and thus knowing the beginnings and ends that are hidden from oneself. Then, when the mind informs one that things are temporally originated and have an originator, it keeps him away from the desires of the lower soul, so that one knows that [abandoning reflection] is the work of Satan. On the other hand, it is not possible that one neglects any of the organs [in the human body] on account of the benefit that has been placed in them. One does not refrain from using them absolutely. Rather, it is necessary to refrain from the harmful aspects and only to employ them in beneficial aspects. Therefore, reason and reflection, which enable us to know beneficial and harmful things, are more worthy of not being neglected.

Also, one who reflects is subject to one of the three characteristics when an idea comes to his mind:

i) Either one's reflection leads him to know that he is temporal and he has an originator who rewards him for his good deeds and punishes him for his evil deeds. Therefore, one should avoid the things that may draw the wrath of his originator upon himself and should turn to the things that will please Him, so that he attains felicity and achieves the honor of both worlds.

ii) Or [one's reflection] leads him to reject the things we have described, so he enjoys various pleasures. As for punishment, [he awaits it in the Hereafter].

iii) Or it leads one to know that it is difficult to ascertain the truth of that to which one has been called, so that one gets rid of the fears that dwell with him due to the thoughts that haunt him and his heart finds peace.

In conclusion, if one is fair, he profits from his reflection in every respect. *Strength comes from God alone.*

4) It is said: If it is possible that God commands the servant with what his intellect cannot understand, why is it impossible that He address him with what he does not understand?<sup>649</sup>

The answer is as follows: There is no difference between the two and what you have mentioned is absolutely impossible [i.e., that He might either command or address him with what he does not understand]. God has made a way for man to understand everything that He has commanded him by directing the intellect or by the address of the [revealed] tradition. Whoever falls short in his capacity of understanding, he is exempted from the command. However, the aspects of the fundamentals are diverse, and their kind is known through reflection and thinking.<sup>650</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

5) If [the interlocutor] says: In the visible world, there is no more acceptable excuse than the servant saying to his master: "I did not know that my act angered You, so that I would leave it. Had I known that, I would have refrained from what I did." Why is this [excuse] not acceptable in the case of God's wisdom?<sup>651</sup>

It is said: [This excuse] is good among us [i.e., human beings], because there is no evidence through which the command is known. As for God, exalted is He, He has created evidence for his servant that the command in question has been commanded, stimulating his mind with ideas, and warning him through various lessons. The [failure to understand His command] only occurs because he abandoned reflection, which is his own action. Therefore, [the servant] is unjustified when offering an apology. For he has turned away from [understanding His command] through his own actions. *Strength comes from God alone.*

649 According to this contention, if it is acknowledged that a person may not understand certain commands from God without the revealed law, why cannot God address His servants in revelation with language that they cannot understand?

650 The response to the contention is that anything that is commanded by God is either understood through reason or revelation. If one does not have the means to understand a given command, it is not binding upon them.

651 This argument is made from the perspective of one who holds that, for instance, one is not rewarded or punished in the absence of revelation. Here, it can be seen that, for al-Māturidī, divine wisdom underpins moral determination.



6) The Jurist Abū Mansūr (may God have mercy on him) said: The principle in [this matter] is that the knowledge of God and His command is an accident that can only be obtained through inference. And He has granted [the human being] states of life to rely upon in his inference. Also, as we have explained, necessity leads one to reflect and to think about his various states, organs, benefits and harms, the knowledge of which leads him to well-being and the ignorance of which leads him to destruction. Among his benefits is his knowledge that he does not govern the aforementioned states that compel him to know [God], to whom he owes his existence. *Strength comes from God alone.*

#### [4.7. Ibn Shabīb's Argument for the Temporality of Bodies]

Muḥammad b. Shabīb argues for the temporality of bodies based on them not being devoid of stillness and motion, that is, staying in their places and changing their places. [Stillness and motion] are temporal because [the body] differs in [being] in two places<sup>652</sup> with one preceding the other. Temporality has been established in [at least] one of the two [i.e., stillness and motion]. Even if it is named "matter" in one of the two bodies [i.e., the body in its two locations], one should say it is temporal. Through the origination of other than what we have said [i.e., motion] by the disappearance [of stillness], the existence of the body in other than the place you see it at first is known.

Through this necessity, which reveals the change of place in the body, we know the motion that cannot be experienced. For we observe a change of state in the sensible thing, and through the resting of the thing in the initial place and its relocation to the second, we know that what is named "resting" in the first state transforms into motion and relocation in the second. Additionally, motion is not described as the harmony and contrariety of the body because these are the right of the body [whereas motion is other than the body]. Then, Zayd is more deserving of [being characterized with motion] than 'Amr, because the motion of 'Amr is imagined based on its absence from Zayd when [Zayd] is found in other than the first place.<sup>653</sup>

652 Reading *'alā ithnayn al-makān* with MS. 69v.

653 This passage, which al-Māturīdī quotes from Ibn Shabīb without objection, coheres with his later-expressed view that the "accident" of stillness is the existence of a body



1) [Ibn Shabīb's opponent] replies: How is that possible? [Motion] is your action and no one knows the howness of his action beforehand. So, why have you demonstrated motion through measurable criteria?

It is said to the opponent: One only knows the "how" of priority and posteriority, which is our action, not the otherness of [motion] to us [i.e., to the parts of the body]. And we only establish the indication to this otherness. Do you not see that a group denies [its] otherness to the body, though they affirm priority and posteriority?<sup>654</sup>

Then, since the temporality of that which he has mentioned [i.e., motion] has been established and the body is not before it, so the temporality of [the body] has also been established.

The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: This expression [i.e., proving the temporality of the body from the temporality of motion] is one that the People of Monotheism have always been proud. However, [Ibn Shabīb] prolonged the question and answer on this statement. Hence, I have alluded to what he mentioned without prolonging it.

2) Then, the objection was made [to Ibn Shabīb] that the motion is [identical with] the body. [Ibn Shabīb] replied: No one who adopts the idea that the body is eternal would ask this question because [motion] is temporal according to the senses. He added: It is impossible for a [moving] body to exist in the initial place except<sup>655</sup> in a state of interpenetration.<sup>656</sup> The interpenetrating object requires another motion for relocation, so [this second motion] is different from the body. Additionally, if the second [motion] is

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in a second moment without it having changed its location relative to the previous moment, whereas "motion" is its existence in a new location. In other words, as Ibn Shabīb argues, motion cannot be experienced, and has to be inferred based on relative change between moments.

654 Again, the focus is to criticize those who did not see an "otherness" of motion to parts of the body by drawing a distinction between a prior and subsequent relational accident.

655 Reading *illā 'alā al-tadākhul* along with a marginal correction on MS. 70r.

656 Ibn Shabīb was a student of al-Nazzām and here references his position of the interpenetration of bodies (*al-tadākhul*), which he may have held himself in some form (see van Ess, *Theology and Society*, Vol. 4, 145, n. 45). He argues that something could only move while it is still in its initial location due to the proposed motion of a body from its latent state to its manifestation on the outside of its body. This apparently would be counted as a case in which motion is identical to the body. Cf. Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, Vol. 4, 145-46.



interpenetrated, the bodies must interpenetrate forever. If this is possible, it is also possible for the earth to interpenetrate with an egg.<sup>657</sup> [Ibn Shabīb] answers similarly for the mutual meeting [of bodies].<sup>658</sup> But all this is just useless prolongation. Had [Ibn Shabīb] been fair, he would have found that which hinders [the opponent] from his evidence, namely his [own] statement: "In the beginning, the body was neither still nor moving." So, this frees the body from what [the opponent] mentions [i.e., from being identical to motion], and in that is a precedence over what he describes. However, there obtains no such thing as "the state of beginning" for one who argues for the eternity [of body], since the [notion of the "beginning"] makes [the body] temporal. Therefore, [the opponent] must hold what is described [i.e., that motion is identical to the body].<sup>659</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

[Ibn Shabīb] tries to demonstrate that the stillness of the body is different from the body by saying, "He is in such-and-such house". If there was nothing except the body and the house, one could not exist anywhere else but [the house]. However, the house exists even when it is not described as having one inside it.<sup>660</sup>

Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: This [the fact that stillness and motion are other than body] is too obvious for anyone to ask about, because when the body is in motion, its stillness disappears, but its corporeality does not depart from it. Thus, it has been established that stillness is other [than the body].

Then, [Ibn Shabīb] replies to one who says: "Perhaps the stillness of [the body] is together with it wherever it is". [He says:] What is mentioned is the amount of its stillness in a place that may be increased or decreased. Thus, it has been established that it is something other than the first stillness.<sup>661</sup>

657 In this scenario, Ibn Shabīb argues that the motion needed for relocation is distinct from the body and its interpenetrating motion. If it is said that the second motion for relocation is, in fact, for interpenetration (and hence part of the body), then the cost is to make the entire world a single interpenetrating body with absurd consequences.

658 This likely refers to the effect of a body in motion coming into contact with another body.

659 Al-Māturīdī argues here that the position that motion is identical to the body goes hand in hand with the position that the world is past-eternal with no initial state.

660 If there was no stillness, then one could never have one's existence inside the house replaced by existence outside of the house (i.e., the realization of motion). But this is absurd.

661 For example, a body may stand still in a place for varying amounts of time. For exam-



[Al-Māturīdī said:] This, like the first, is something not asked about, and the answer is our explanation above. *Help may be asked only from God.*

Then, Ibn Shabīb prolonged the discourse on this issue, but I have left it because there is no benefit in it. In what he has given of evidence for the otherness of stillness and motion [i.e., from the body], such as the possibility of each of them replacing the other and that they both are other [i.e., mutually exclusive], is the invalidation of the doctrine of most of the Mu'tazila that things are made to endure without [an accident] of endurance.<sup>662</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

Again, [Ibn Shabīb], in response to one who opposes him by arguing that bodies have never been devoid of what I have mentioned [i.e., both motion and stillness] since eternity, claims that this is impossible. For the condition of eternity for the whole [consisting of motion and stillness] is fulfilled only if the other [element] exists in the whole, but this nullifies the existence [of the whole]. Ibn Shabīb tries to demonstrate this with the example of entering the house mentioned previously. Additionally, he claims in the case of two birds flying side-by-side from one direction, one cubit apart: It is not possible that they are like this without a limit as their fundamental constituent, because removing the limit requires them to be joined side-by-side. Yet separation<sup>663</sup> is found between them.<sup>664</sup>

3) [Ibn Shabīb] has argued [for the temporality of the world] based on the opposition of [bodily] things in terms of heaviness, lightness, heat, cold,

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ple, for ten minutes, or for five or twenty minutes. Because the corporeality of a body does not change as the period of its stillness is prolonged or shortened, the body is not identical with its stillness (*Translator*).

662 The view of the Basran Mu'tazila was that bodies and various kinds of accidents persist in existence until destroyed due to the kind of objects they are, rather than taking into account the relative property of "endurance" (*baqā*). See Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām*, 46-47. Such a position is invalidated by the distinction that Ibn Shabīb draws between the body itself and its accidental states of stillness and motion.

663 Reading *al-tafāḍul* as *al-tafāsul* on MS. 70v.

664 This example seems to rely on an application of Euclid's parallel postulate. Assuming that the lines describing the birds' flight are not parallel, then if they have been flying forever, their paths would, per the postulate, have intersected. But they have been specified as separated. Euclid's *Elements* had been translated from the late second/eighth to early third/ninth century, with al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Maṭar and then Ishāq b. Hunayn as the major figures to whom translations have been ascribed. See Sonja Brentjes, "Who Translated Euclid's *Elements* into Arabic?", 22-23.



and so on. He has established the falsity of the idea that one thing has been generated from another without beginning. Also, it is in the nature of opposing things to repel each other and to become distant. This is particularly the case when followers of this doctrine [of the eternity of the world] make two separate elements that have been in opposition to each other mix [i.e., Dualism]. Therefore, it is impossible for them to join together [by themselves], according to what [such a person] mentions. Moreover, the difference between them is by nature. If it were possible for both to leave the nature that I have mentioned, it would be possible for the cold to heat [things] and for the hot to cool [them]. If this were possible, it would be possible for them to leave their enduring nature and perish. Since this option is false and invalid, it becomes clear that the doctrine of the People of Monotheism is established. That is, there is an omniscient governor who unites these [opposites, which form the world]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: We say, hoping for success from God: If one adopts the discourse that there is more than one [creator, the following contradictions arise]. Of the several creators, either each can destroy the other or not, or only one may have this power. In the first and second cases, both creators are powerless, and will not know how to destroy the other by either force or trickery. If one of them is sufficiently powerful, the others are negated because He has the power of exclusive possession of sovereignty: He does not allow others to act hostilely to Him in His dominion or to contest with Him in his lordship. Then, the powerless and ignorant one is more rightfully a servant and a slave than a lord and a king. *Strength comes from God alone.*

4) This refutes those who affirm [the dualism of] darkness and light because light did not know that it would fall captive to [darkness], and darkness [did not know] that it would be hindered from its function, which is to do evil, by light. In addition, the parts of [darkness and light] have been torn apart and their situation has been turned upside down; as a result, neither of them managed to exercise authority and control its [region]. Our Lord is exalted above having such quality.

Also, the Dualists say that [light and darkness] have a boundary on one side, which is negated from the other sides. So, if the negation is an



evidence of eternity, temporality is necessary on the side of the boundary. If this is not the case, it, the whole must be temporal. On the other hand, if light cannot save its finite parts from the hands of its enemies by means of its infinite parts, and if the infinite parts cannot preserve that part, which is in front of it before it falls captive to [darkness], how can it do this after [it] has come under the control of [darkness]? According to the doctrine that designates all the senses and knowledge for light to the exclusion of darkness, then conversely all of the blind who cannot see, the incapable [person] who has no power, and the weak who has no strength, are [darkness]: evil by nature and not by power. That is why we ask God to protect us from straying from His path and from falling into the trap of the Dualists. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Also, if the two [principles] are body or accident, they must have an individual place. If they are accidents [i.e., of the relational or vital kind], their departure from their places necessitates their disappearance. If they are bodies, each has its place from its bodily substance, so it cannot exist in an [environment] opposite to its state. This is like an aquatic animal trying to live on land, a land animal trying to live in the sea, and an animal with nocturnal vision trying to live in the daytime. If each [has its place] in other than its substance, then good is associated with evil, and vice-versa. This ruins the basis of their doctrine on the number [of deities; i.e., the doctrine that since good and evil cannot reconcile, their principles must be distinct]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

#### 4.8. A Critique of the Doctrines of the Dahrīs

Abū Maṣṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Then let us quote the doctrines of the Dahrīs and clarify their teachings as reported by Ibn Shabīb and others, because the elucidation of their doctrines is evidence for their falsity. We have already learned that [the Dahrīs] agree on the eternity of the primordial matter of the world, but they disagree on the eternity or temporality of the generation of the world [as a result of processing the matter]. This is the summary of the Dahrīs' teachings.

1) The Naturalists argue that there are four [natures]: hot, cold, wet and dry. For them, the beings in the world differ due to the different mixtures of these [natures]. When the mixture of natures is harmonious, the



beings that are generated from it will also be harmonious. The same applies to the motion of the Sun, the Moon and the stars [i.e., their harmonious motion comes from the harmony of their mixture]. They have been acting since eternity as they are acting now: things have no beginning. [The Naturalists] name the motions of the [natures] "accidents", citing the case of paints such as white, red, black, green, etc., to illustrate this misconception of theirs. That is, when the paints are mixed, the colors vary according to the abundance, scarcity, thinness and thickness [of the paints]. There is no such thing as the generation of colors [from nothing]. However, the people possessing these colors may be unaware of [the exact components of a mixture] that produces [a certain color]. They say the same thing about natures [as constituents of things in the world].

Shaykh Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: Whoever ponders this doctrine according to the examples they have given, comes to realize that their example establishes the very position of the People of Monotheism. This is because paints cannot mix by themselves. In addition, if the paints were to mix by themselves, an ugly color would emerge, such that it would be counted by intellects as a corruption of the paints. But if one wise and omniscient mixes them knowing the results of that mixture, the resulting color will be harmonious and beautiful. Therefore, the one who has brought the world into existence is omniscient and wise, knowing the results of things, bringing them out accordingly. And this reveals the falsity of the idea that those natures – primordial matter, or whatever they call it – emerged on their own as they are presently. Hence, it is established that the creator of [the natures] is a wise governor and it is necessary that He existentiated them from nothing. In addition, none of the colors are described by what they mention of heat and cold because a certain color may dominate a thing and it may become hot, but the same color may dominate another thing, yet it may be cold. Thus, it is clear that none of these colors have been generated by the factors which they have mentioned or those they have not mentioned [i.e., of a similar kind]. This necessitates other than that which they say. *God alone leads to success.*

Likewise, we see that bodily objects have various flavors. In other words, although they are of the same color and nature, they may taste salty, sour, bitter, or have a disposition that does not tend to any of that. Thus, it



has been established that all of these [flavors] exist through the governance of one who has the power to create everything as He wills without secondary causes.<sup>665</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

[Another explanation is as follows]: These natures are either bodily substances or accidents. If we accept them to be substances, they become what he has mentioned of different [things in the world] due to the accidents that appear in them, which are joining and separation. Without these two [accidents], each bodily substance [i.e., the four natures] would be separate [and would not combine to form bodies].<sup>666</sup> The diversity of the substances, along with the joining of mixtures in them, indicates the domination of accidents over them, which transform them from one state to another. Then, accidents cannot subsist or have effects in things on account of themselves. Hence, it has been established that [the accidents] perform this function in things by one who knows that they act like this. Only one who can make these bodily substances suitable for bearing accidents may know that. It is impossible for there to be knowledge like this except for the one who made them so [i.e., God]. This requires the doctrine of one omniscient and omnipotent from whom nothing is hidden, and for whom it is not difficult to existentiate whatever He wills to be.

On the other hand, if these natures are accidents, it is impossible for them to originate and subsist by themselves.<sup>667</sup> Thus, the doctrine of an eternal creator is necessary along with origination of whatever is in [the world]. It is due to Him that it enters the limits of existence on the basis that the temporality of accidents is something about which there is no dispute. *Strength comes from God alone.*

665 The word used is *asbāb*. Given al-Māturīdī's commitment both to the causal powers of natures in general, and to God's timeless existentiation of everything, the likely meaning is that God does not bring about effects indirectly through the secondary causation propounded by the Naturalists. Rather, He can bring very different flavors from objects with the same color and basic nature.

666 The argument is that even if the natures are granted (for the sake of argument) to be bodies in their own right, they would still at the very least need accidents for joining and separation. This is enough to show that the world is not eternal. Below he shows that accidents cannot operate without the involvement of God.

667 Whereas in the first option al-Māturīdī suggests that even if he grants his opponents' assumptions, they do not lead to their desired conclusions, this second option, in which natures are identified with the accidents that directly constitute bodies, seems to better reflect al-Māturīdī's own position. See the Editor's Introduction.



In addition, it is known that these natures oppose one another. The due right of opposition is mutual repelling. This entails separation, dispersal, and annihilation. It is impossible for the components of things to self-subsist along with the contradiction I mentioned. Therefore, if things have existed, this is due [to one] who prevents the repelling that requires dispersal. Again, [this one] joins [the components] after separation and subjugates them to Him; and the world has been joined [in this way]. Thus, it has been established that the world is temporal, which exposes the falsity of the doctrine that [it is generated] from the natures, because the existence of a thing from nothing is not more rationally far-fetched than the subsistence of a thing with its opposite, which eliminates it. Since [the Naturalists] consider [origination from nothing] to be intellectually far-fetched, they have adopted this view. When they become trapped by that from the like of which they flee, then their doctrine has been refuted and their apologies have disappeared. *We ask God for protection.*

[Another] group embraces a similar [teaching on the origin of the world], with the difference that they claim that there is not a known number for the genus [of natures, i.e., rather than four]. But they all say that things as a whole are eternal, from the north to the south, from the east to the west, from their top to their bottom.

2) A group of astrologers claim that the stars have been managing the affairs of the world since eternity. [The stars] are related to the world, such that happiness comes from them, and so it differs depending on the difference in its relations with them. [They compare the relationship between the stars and the world] to the silk-weaver's loom with the silk threads tied to the top of the loom because of [the pattern] that appears on [the loom] and other than it [i.e., the cloth] as the board goes up and down. Such is the relationship of the stars with the world: the form of the world differs according to the movement of the stars and the difference and harmony of the stars is the cause of happiness and unhappiness in the world. The stars have been moving since eternity, and from each movement a different thing originates and that [thing] goes on to generate [another]. They say similar things about the chicken and the egg, attributing [this procreation] to the movements of the stars like the silk weaving that I have described.



[The astrologers] claim that bodies are eternal and not accidents, while movements are accidents that occur without end. They say that the state of the whole world is compelled due to joining and separation of the stars and celestial spheres in this way. So, they say the same about the stars [i.e., they are eternal and compelled too]. *God alone leads to success.*

The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: As for the claim of endless movements, we have shown this to be false in the previous pages.<sup>668</sup> Also, there is no doubt that motion is destroyed [upon an object becoming still]. Certainly,<sup>669</sup> [the destroyed motion] is the end of [the object's] previous motions, so that after it there is nothing from what preceded. Since it has been established that motion has an end in terms of annihilation and termination, it is not possible that it terminates at an end unless it has a finite beginning. So, [motions] have a beginning [and they are not eternal].

On the other hand, we see that all bodily substances have different boundaries. This would not be possible except due to the tiniest difference that appears for most of [the substances]. Hence, from the smallest state there is a growth in size and weight after it did not exist, whereas there is a diminution of the large and heavy after it did not exist, not from anything that preceded it. This is because what is made to be eternal is necessarily even. Yet difference is established. Hence, it is affirmed that what preceded came into existence after it did not exist, as this gives meaning to what it is.

If motions, which are circular, are made to be linear in one direction, then they follow one another, and where some exist, others are destroyed. If the motions were necessarily eternal, their destruction would be eternal, too. Thus, the motions would be a non-existing existent in eternity. This is contradictory, for existence and non-existence cannot unite in one state. The same is true in all states. This necessitates the beginning of motion [and abolishes its eternity].

If one of the two things moving in linear motion is seen traveling faster than the other, either the beginning of one is prior to the beginning of the other, or one is going faster than the other. If the end [i.e., the first temporal moment] is removed from these two, the end [i.e., the difference] between them also disappears. But this contradicts experience. Hence, it has been

668 See 2.1.3.

669 Reading *a-lā annahā* on MS. 73r.



established that both motions have a beginning. This meaning also applies to circular motions. *God alone leads to success.*

With these [explanations], we refute all those who hold to the eternity of bodily substances that have never been devoid of accidents. *Strength comes from God alone.* We talk to the Naturalists in the same way.

3) Then, the following is said to the two groups altogether [i.e., astrologers and the Naturalists]: How do you know that [the world is eternal], as you claim? If they claim [the support of] tradition on [this subject], they will be answered with the tradition that was transmitted by those people who have much evidence for their veracity and therefore are more worthy of being declared truthful, namely, the messengers.<sup>670</sup> If they claim to have obtained it through the senses, their knowledge of their own existence belies them, because they do not remember that they are eternal, nor have they witnessed the governance of the world by stars and natures. If they resort to inferring from what they see, then there is no evidence in anything they see that the stars govern the world, natures are eternal, and the world is generated from their mixing. On the contrary, the opposite of what the two factions [i.e., the astrologers and Naturalists] say is closer to reality and more accurate in rational demonstration. As for the case of natures, if there exists a lot of agitation and movement, they generate warmth in the object that agitates and moves, whereas lots of stillness and settling gives rise to wetness. In that case, the natures are generated from the states of the world, not the world from [natures]. This is closer to the due right of the senses.

Then, it is said: The motion of the celestial sphere and the motion of the stars, as well as their changing to states of joining and separation, occur as a result of the changes in the states of the substances of the lands and what is in them from the kinds of trees and seas. The waters, whose vapors ascend [and reach the heavens] are the substance of separation, while the fires, and real substances, ascend with their substances. Accordingly, the state of the stars and the thing mentioned [i.e., the sphere] changes. This is closer to observation and more worthy of being evidence for what is absent from us.<sup>671</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

670 Note that, although the tradition (*sam'*) of the messengers is considered superior by al-Māturīdī, it represents a wider epistemic category than them alone.

671 In other words, the order of explanation ought to proceed bottom-up from the changing phenomena observed in the world towards that of the universe.



4) Then, [Ibn Shabīb] uses the same argument that he has used against the Naturalists: The Creator's action emerged decisive and perfect thanks to His knowledge and power, without which it would not have been possible. This is due to what preceded of governance and administration. The same holds true of the stars. If the stars and the world had been as [the astrologer] says, it would have been like this because of the governance of one omniscient and wise who created them in this way. If the governance belonged to [the stars], they would not tire and pain themselves by travel and constant movement, for such is the case with living things in the visible world. These states exhaust them and give them pain. Or [one can argue:] the stars are inanimate. Thus, [their movements] are governed by another, as he mentioned in the example of silk weaving. This is because it is known that if the stars could do all this without tiring themselves, they would choose it for themselves. So, all this happens through the governance of one wise, omniscient and independent, applying all that he mentions in what he mentions. *Strength comes from God alone.*

Also, if it may be said that our world is governed by the mentioned [stars and celestial spheres], then [the stars and the spheres] may also be said to be governed by another above them without end. This refutes their view that the stars govern the world, or it leads to an end. This [existence of an end] invalidates their doctrine that there is no end to things and necessitates the position that there is a being upon which the governance of everything relies. This being knows the ends of things and measures out everything that depends upon Him.<sup>672</sup> [The astrologers] acknowledge according to their doctrine that they have no personal opinion because, as they claim, they have no choice. Rather, they are compelled in what they say and likewise their opponents [are compelled] when they lie to them. Hence, mutual lying and contradiction originate from this governor [i.e., the stars and spheres]. One whose governance is like this is corruptive and one whose speech is worth this much does not speak from himself. This has two consequences:

672 This amounts to a version of the cosmological argument from contingency since it relies on God's ontological precedence to the creation.



i) His word falls, and the word of the monotheists remains.

ii) He denies the sensory knowledge and choice that are known by everyone and every rational person. Whoever denies sensory knowledge that his senses comprehend and then claims an unseen thing, which his senses cannot reach, on the basis of what his senses perceive and he himself denies, this person – with praise to God – is not worth the trouble and should be left alone. *Help may only be asked from God.*

If states were compulsory, one could not stop eating and drinking when he was afraid, he could not turn to [food and drink] due to desire, and he could not enjoy [eating and drinking]. However, all these are present according to one's character, so [desire and enjoyment of worldly pleasure] are less in the great person than in the mean one. If this happened by nature or due to the relation to the stars, it would be necessary that everyone would be the same with respect to it.<sup>673</sup>

It is impossible for various acts and states such as cooling, heating, evil and goodness to emerge from a natural being. Thus, it has been established that none of these acts and states are through a natural being, but through an omniscient and wise one who fashions everything upon such a state in [its] creation and existence. If acts happened by being pushed towards them, the agent would be like one who was pushed from behind his head, or like one who fell from the top of a house, or like one who was tied with ropes and could not resist. *Strength comes from God alone.*

In concrete reality, a paralyzed person knows that he does not refrain from what occurs [on the contrary, it is due to physical incapacity]. The same holds true of the blind and people with other disabled organs. In addition, he knows that it is possible that these physical disabilities may disappear, and he could possess the opposite of these states. So, in general terms, the discourse of necessity [and determinism] is false.

673 Lit. "There would be for everyone a [single] heart (*qalb*) in it." Reading MS. 74v as *qalb* with K, 146. The idea is that natures or the stars cannot account for the diversity in human appetites.

5) Another group claimed that the primordial matter of the world is eternal. It has been named "prime matter" and along with it is a "power".<sup>674</sup> [Prime matter] is eternal with its qualities, by which it is: lengthless, widthless, depthless, weightless, placeless, colorless, tasteless, odorless, not soft, not hard, not hot, not cold, not wet, motionless, restless, and having no accident in its beginning. It was named "prime matter" at that time. The power transformed the prime matter by nature, not by will, and [the above] accidents originated, such that it was named "substance". It is a single substance and is the substance of the world. Separation and union have come from the accidents. But accidents are not characterized by difference and union, because they exist only through another. Moreover, an accident does not exist through another accident, but through substance. Substance, on the other hand, is separated and united through the accidents.

Aristotle, who adopts this view [the theory of hylomorphism] in his book, which he named *Logic*,<sup>675</sup> counts ten categories: 1) Substance: for example, when you say "human", you mean the selfsame human; 2) Place: like your word "where?"; 3) Quality: by your word "how?"; 4) Time: "when?"; 5) Quantity: that is, "how many?"; 6) Relation: when one [of a pair] is mentioned, the other is also mentioned. For example, father [and child], servant [and master], partner [and partner], and so on; 7) Possession: for example, "possessor of honor" and "possessor of family" – they name it "category of wealth"; 8) Position: for example, standing and sitting; 9) Acting: like your statement, "he ate"; 10) Acted upon: for example, "eaten". No one can mention anything that falls outside of these [ten categories].<sup>676</sup> They claimed with respect to the power that it is ignorant and acts by nature, and the prime matter does not need accidents.

674 This "power" (*quwwa*) should likely be read as the "form" of the hylomorphic matter-form pairing. In this section, al-Māturīdī repeatedly refers to the power "transforming" the prime matter.

675 This is a reference to the *Organon*, which contained the *Categories*, and had been translated into Arabic by the mid-second/eighth century. See Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, 35-36.

676 It is possible that al-Māturīdī cites Aristotle at this juncture because it would seem that prime matter falls outside of his doctrine of categories. See Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, 36. On the opponents' position, it is only once substance is generated that it can gain accidental qualification through the other nine categories. But this would leave it impossible to speak about prime matter.



The Jurist (may God have mercy on him) said: Whoever ponders the view to which these people are inclined knows that the reason they have come to it is their ignorance of the blessings of God, so they are blind to the right path and have gone astray. Then, the bewilderment of straying has caused them to accommodate the like of this fantasy to which the intellect will not incline, and the passion does not seek. *Help may only be asked from God.*

Otherwise, who informed them that the beginning of the world is what they mention [i.e., prime matter]? Then, there are no features attributed to it in its stated name, there is no evidence in the substance of the world for its described function, nor is this possible in terms of the [revealed] tradition. However, they have heard the words of the People of Monotheism in describing God and used them to describe prime matter. Yet they never reflected on how this doctrine would expose them, so they went back and denied that which they had affirmed. They have envisioned something [i.e., prime matter], which in its essence refuses to accept accidents and resists the meaning of [bodily] substances one substance at a time. Then, no trace of its initial state remains. In the last stage of the world, be it eternal or temporal, all that remains is substances and accidents; [so, the prime matter] that does not have this quality has disappeared. This means that the world has perished on its own and the eternal in its essence has transformed due to the accidents that subdued and destroyed it but could not subsist by themselves. This doctrine requires the whole world to be temporal. However, the magnitude of this doctrine leads to that fantasy. That is because everything that has been grasped is only either accident or substance, therefore it cannot be the First.

Then, if [Aristotle] calls himself wise and forces others to renounce their view and follow his whims, his view is negated after his statement: "The source from which he comes is ignorant and foolish". The accidents are others, which have been caused by a sickly power lacking knowledge and wisdom. So, he is one of its children who has never attained anything except by [that power]. So, how does he hold himself above that [ignorant and foolish] power [and call himself wise]? If it is possible [for him to be wise] without a source through which he can be so, let him say about the whole world what he has said about himself.

Next, the power that transforms the prime matter has dominion over something other than it, through which it effects the transformation. So, let him say that God, exalted is He, creates the prime matter or whatever He wishes in such a way that it accepts change and forms a composition. Then, let him name it whatever he wishes, so long as what transformed it [i.e., the power] perishes. Hence, the source of the world disappears and is destroyed, though it is impossible for a self-subsistent thing to be destroyed, so that by its destruction there is the transformation of another and its subsistence [and this is absurd!] Additionally, [the power's] annihilation applies to the prime matter, so it becomes deprived of the power of transformation. This causes the world and its change from one state to another to be aborted. Therefore, the existence of the world indicates the falsity of this source [the doctrine of prime matter].

On the other hand, that which is suitable for a thing in the visible world becomes such only through a wise agent who makes it that way. So, it is established that if the beginning of the world is suitable to accept bodily substances and accidents, then all [things] are like that based on Him making it that way.

Since the power transforms [the prime matter] by nature and is not separate from it, what is wrong with it that it has not performed this action in eternity? However, in the visible world, a natural thing does not cease to perform its function. Also, either the temporally generated accidents existed in the prime matter earlier, so [Aristotle's] statement, "[Prime matter] was devoid of [accidents] until they originated" is invalid, or [these accidents] did not exist [in the matter], so they originated from nothing. Since the power is characterized the same as the prime matter and there are no accidents in the power, it has been established that [the accidents] came into existence from nothing in this respect, too. This meaning [i.e., the fact that they see it as impossible for a thing to come into existence from nothing] caused them to adopt the view that they adopted [i.e., the doctrine of prime matter]. So, it has been refuted with praise to God.

All of what they say about the power may be turned against them: what is supposed about prime matter may also be supposed about the power. This is on the basis that the [power] must be different from prime matter,



so they are two things. Nevertheless, [Aristotle] claims that the amount is from the category of quantity, but a new generation has not occurred [and therefore multiplicity has not occurred yet]. But the duality of [prime matter and power] necessitated such a generation to have occurred. Alternatively, [the power] is the same as the prime matter, according to which [Aristotle's] statement: "The power is with the prime matter, or it is that which transforms the prime matter" is invalidated. Accordingly, the power seems to have transformed itself, and not the prime matter.<sup>677</sup>

Additionally, [Aristotle] claimed that these accidents have appeared in the prime matter, such that they moved, kept still, raised and lowered it. However, there is nothing else for the prime matter to move towards, settle within, rise or lower towards. Although there are similar misconceptions about that from which the world has been composed, [the claim of prime matter] is the most corrupt in its source.

Muḥammad b. Shabīb claimed that [Aristotle] named the power "motion". According to his report, the power may only be characterized by the qualities that characterize prime matter. [Ibn Shabīb] has mentioned that [Aristotle] forsook his views on prime matter, but I do not know whether this is true or not. However, [Aristotle] named the power "motion" and it is in the prime matter. Therefore, [Aristotle's] view that prime matter cannot be characterized by motion has been refuted because he has characterized it so.

Then, the power is either in contact with prime matter or it is separated from it. Whichever one of the two he asserts, it has been established that [Aristotle] affirms for it corporeality and accidentality, because separation and contact are different from that which is in contact and that which is separate.

Then, their doctrine [i.e., of prime matter] is that the bodily substances have been generated from the motions of the source; such is the case with the doctrine of the astrologers. However, it is known that substances exist above, below and on every side. Since these various motions are impossible, this claim has proven to be unfounded.

<sup>677</sup> This is a dilemma as follows: either prime matter and the power to transform it are two, in which case there is multiplicity before any generation, or they are one, in which case there is no meaning to prime matter that is transformed by the power. Rather, there is just the transformation. Al-Māturidī contends that each option leads to incoherence.

[Ibrāhīm] al-Nazzām<sup>678</sup> opposed them on this point, [arguing]: If the power transforming the prime matter is the cause for the generation of the accidents, the accidents are various, such as color, taste, warmth, softness, etc., and all of these things generate at a single time and by one motion, then all the accidents will have generated from [a single] aspect.<sup>679</sup>

This is answered as follows: Accidents have been generated from multiple aspects [and not from a single aspect].

[Al-Nazzām] claimed that these aspects are six at most. However, more than twelve accidents are generated. Therefore, it has been established that the accidents have not been generated through the power transforming [the prime matter] on the basis that transforming happens in one aspect whereas the accidents are many. Thus, it has been established that it is not as [Aristotle] says.

Muḥammad b. Shabīb opposed them by saying: Prime matter did not have length before accidents were generated. Nor do accidents have length. So, how have those [bodily substances] gained length in [factual] existence? The same holds true of width. If this were possible [i.e., if it were possible for bodily substances with length to be generated from the combination of prime matter and accidents without length], then combining the [object] not devoid [of a quality] with what is not devoid [of a quality]<sup>680</sup> would lead to that which is devoid [of the quality].<sup>681</sup> The same [i.e., the former] would be the case with all accidents, for example no blackness and no blackness<sup>682</sup> [i.e., this combination would result in blackness].<sup>683</sup>

678 Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. ca 220/835-230/845) was an influential early Mu'tazilī theologian of the Basran school. He is known for holding a large number of unusual theological positions. See van Ess, "Abū Eshāq Nazzām."

679 This is impossible because various things cannot generate from a single aspect; rather, several aspects are required (*Translator*).

680 Reading *wa-mā lā yakhlū* with MS. 76v and K, 150.

681 In other words, the converse case would be true.

682 Reading *wa-lā sawād* with K, 150. MS. 76v has an additional *wāw* before this phrase, which is likely a scribal error.

683 The argument here is that the Naturalist who upholds both a concept of prime matter and accidents without intrinsic qualities (so, that prime matter has no dimension and neither do accidents), cannot account for how the bodies comprised of them have dimension. Moreover, this principle leads to absurd conclusions in the converse scenario.



[Ibn Shabīb further] answers them [i.e., the Naturalists] as follows: Quicklime and arsenic do not burn when they are on their own but do when they are combined. It is not unlikely that only one of them might be caustic, but it might contain an element that blocks the burning, and the other might contain an obstacle that prevents this blocking element from working, so [when they are combined] it burns. It is not that one or both elements lacks causticity. According to you [i.e., the Naturalist], the state of the accidents is as we have mentioned [i.e., they lack intrinsic properties]. Had [the accident] been long or black, it would have been impossible for the blocker to inhere in it. The same is the case with prime matter, which is why [prime matter and bodies with latent properties] differ.<sup>684</sup>

6) The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: According to us, the principle in this topic [of creation] and what is mentioned of stars and natures, is that one must resort to tradition. In this, the reports of the People of Monotheism are the most reliable source of knowledge because they have veracious proofs. Alternatively, one should infer from the present world [of which we have sensory knowledge] to the unseen. If this is his method, since the present world is in a certain state and he will take the factual situation into account, that through which the world has come into existence must have this quality [i.e., the proper quality to realize the state of the present world]. Therefore, their view that the world has been generated through the mixture of [natures], the motion of the stars, the power transforming prime matter, and the simultaneous [transformation] of prime matter and the power has been refuted. Considering the meanings in the world that signify [the unseen], the principle is that every natural being may only be changed into a different [state] by a wise or foolish agent [that is, it cannot transform itself into another state]. However, the status of

684 Ibn Shabīb's further point seems to rely on the idea of latency (*kumūn*), which he may have upheld following al-Nazzām. His overall point is apparently that his view does not fall into the same problem of accounting for the properties of bodies. He argues that the emergence of combined effects from individual things apparently lacking the requisite properties is based on the latent properties within those things. If everything is comprised of interpenetrating bodies, then the initial worry is negated, as every body expresses its own qualities. But this option is not open for the Naturalist, since their idea of the potency of accidents and prime matter is inconsistent with a theory of intrinsic qualities.

[the wise or foolish agent] is revealed by the results. The same holds true of the source they point to [as the origin of the world]. It is only by a wise agent that [the source] can be changed from its state to one whose results are beneficial. For such is the case [e.g., the world allows the sustenance of human life]. This negates their source [i.e., prime matter] and establishes that the source receives [its properties] because another made it this way. This reveals that [the world] was originated by a wise creator. *God alone leads to success.*

It is also known that whatever's nature is to burn can only burn that which has a nature receptive to burning. The same applies to blackening and to all states and substances. Then, there is not in the nature of the thing receptive [to burning] that which raises it to be subject [to causticity] by [its] nature. Nor is there in the nature of the caustic that which is receptive [to burning]. The only thing that anyone who wants this [effect] in the visible world can do is to know the existence [of these natures] and to combine these two [i.e., the caustic and the receptive]. Thus, the situation of the unseen is compared to this.<sup>685</sup> So, what they aim to establish becomes refuted, and [the unseen] takes the meaning of what they are in [i.e., the visible world]. *God alone leads to success.*

In addition, all these sources that they mention [i.e., prime matter and natures], are inanimate, unable to govern, act by nature, and have no choice. Therefore, it is impossible for the beings in the world that have been composed of them to be knowing, hearing, seeing, powerful, living and mortal, accepting the aspects [of the animate], and leaving the possibilities [of the inanimate].<sup>686</sup> Thus, it has been established that all these are from the Omniscient Existentiator. *Strength comes from God alone.*

685 The intent seems to be that the effect in the visible world is only realized by wise agential action, and hence the same in the unseen.

686 Al-Māturīdī argues that due to the principle of indication operating between the visible world and the unseen, it is impossible for living, knowing beings to be brought into existence from inert and compelled matter alone. There must be a guiding intelligence, God, to add the vital accidents to the natures to realize animate beings.



#### 4.9. Enquiry: [A Critique of the Doctrines of the Sumanīs]

The Sumanīs,<sup>687</sup> a variety of the Dahris due to agreeing on the origination of things in eternity,<sup>688</sup> say: The earth has always been falling downwards together with the things on it.

Al-Nazzām asked them about this, and they cited as evidence the earth's heaviness, and a heavy thing cannot resist the air and cannot suspend in it. [Al-Nazzām] opposed them by citing the speed of the fall of a stone with its weight when it has been dropped with a feather: they both reach the earth, though it is heavier than them both. Next, [al-Nazzām] opposed [the Sumanīs] by mentioning that the wind carries an object and raises it upwards, and not sideways: "Therefore, why should it not be possible for the wind to be under the earth and carry it by its own power? And how can you judge that the earth has been falling down rather than ascending, yet you [mistakenly] see the ascent as a descent." Here, the discussion [between al-Nazzām and the Sumanīs] is interrupted.

If that is the outcome of the debate, it is like playing a game. On the contrary, the principle is that since we first saw the sky, we have been observing it upon a single state and we have been observing the earth as heavy. If every part of [the earth] was dropped from the highest point one can imagine, the sky would adhere to it. This indicates that since the earth and sky alike are fixed in a certain state, and since they are both heavy by nature and cannot suspend in the air, their suspension is through a powerful and wise agent, and He has created the two in a way that imaginations and intellects cannot attain. This shows that the doctrine that the world is eternal, and its consequences, are false.

Nonetheless, it is fruitless to debate with them because the purpose [of debate] is to explore hidden things and bring them to light, as well as

687 The Sumanīs (also: Samanīs) are usually understood as a Buddhist group active in the early Islamic centuries who sometimes engaged in debate with Islamic theologians. As well as the doctrines discussed here, they are said to have denied rational inference. This is the context of their inclusion alongside critique of the Sophists in 4.11. See Waardenburg, "The Early Period: 610-650," 33.

688 As al-Māturidī mentions, the Sumanīs are only associated with other Dahris, or "Eternalists", due to their agreement on this specific cosmological doctrine.

the stopping points for the limits of wisdom.<sup>689</sup> However, they claim that the world, in spite of its antagonisms and harmonies and the differences of bodily substances and accidents, is based on the natures generated by the motions or mixtures of things that have no power and knowledge to govern and no wisdom to make determinations. The human being is one of [these mixtures], so it is impossible for them to possess knowledge or wisdom, unless there is one [i.e., God] who is other than the components of the world to govern them. The fact that the world's highest substances go beyond the nature through which the world has [supposedly] come into existence, shows that the world exists due to Him [i.e., God] who originates His creation however He chooses. *Strength comes from God alone.*

#### 4.10. Enquiry: [A Critique of the Doctrines of the Sophists]

The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: The Sophists have said: We find that the human being knows something, then it is false; one experiences a pleasure, then it disappears; a land animal dies in the sea and a marine animal dies on land; a bat sees at night and is blind in the daytime. This establishes that there is no such thing as knowledge (*episteme*); it is nothing but belief (*doxa*), and others differ.

1) Thereupon, Ibn Shabīb asked the following question: Your statement, "There is no knowledge" is either based on knowledge, so you have affirmed it, or it is not based on knowledge, in which case it would not be right to call [on people to accept] it while aware that you speak without knowledge. If they say, "Based on knowledge", they have established knowledge, whereas if they say the second, they must stay silent. Such is the case with the topic.

The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: There is no point debating anyone who adopts this view because he proceeds on the basis that [knowledge] is not knowledge, but belief. Therefore, [on his view], everything he says during the debate is just that. However, debate can only be conducted with one who rejects [certain] realities, so that his statement is refuted beyond doubt, and likewise his claim. As for one who says,

689 For al-Māturīdī, these limits (*hudūd*) reflect where the human being ought to stop short due to the inability to encompass divine wisdom. See 4.2 and 6.1 (4).



"There is nothing but belief," everything he says is just [a belief]. The only thing one may do in response to him is to strike him painfully and cut [one of his limbs]. Or [the one who debates with the Sophist] believes what the Sophist believes and counters him with the opposite of what he believes, or counters him by saying, "I believe that your denial is an assertion". Thus, he forces him to assert what he denies [i.e., the existence of knowledge].

Additionally, the statement, "There is nothing but belief" affirms the existence of belief. Thus, his negation of knowledge is refuted because he has affirmed the existence of belief. *God alone leads to success.*

Also, [the Sophist] opposes [knowledge] by citing some things the opposite of which are manifest to him. If there were no knowledge in an absolute way, then that the opposite of some things is manifest, which he is relying upon, is refuted. *Strength comes from God alone.*

2) Muḥammad b. Shabīb mentions to himself that someone sees one thing double and someone else sees it as one, asking which one of them is correct. He claims: The reason the first sees it double is his point of view. He sees an angle with each eye that is different from the angle he sees with the other. The evidence for this is that if he had one eye, he would not see [it that way].

The Jurist (may God have mercy on him) said: The principle in this and similar matters is that sensory knowledge changes with the change of the states of the senses. The possessor of senses knows [his] impairment, so he knows that it is a barrier [that prevents perception]. Again, he perceives opposite to the reality in the presence of the impairment, realizing reality itself when it disappears. That occurs at the time the senses apply: [the thing perceived is] either too small, too far or the air is concealed by something, [such as darkness, fog, etc.]. Sometimes [the impairment] may be in the sense of sight and the same holds true of the other senses. All this is known by the senses, so there is nothing to disprove it. In light of this explanation, the view that the contrary [of the reality] might be the case has been refuted [because it consists of an impairment in the senses or in the object]; and either one argues against it [i.e., the apparent reality] or one affirms it. Hence, the view of the negation of reality has been refuted because a difference of opinion has been established. *Strength comes from God alone.*

If the sense of sight cannot perceive something due to an impairment, one knows the reality of it by approaching or giving it more illumination. In such situations, the object becomes evident. *Strength comes from God alone.*

As for our answer about one who is diseased with bile and therefore perceives the taste of honey as bitter, it is because of the impairment in his sense of taste. *Strength comes from God alone.*

3) Ibn Shabīb said: There is disagreement [over the reason why honey tastes bitter]. One group said: There is bitterness in honey, and when [this bitterness] meets the sense of taste, it increases, and one finds it [bitter]. Another group said: One who is diseased with bile has its bitterness in his sense of taste. When the sweetness of honey meets the bitterness in the sense of taste and acts upon it, one finds its taste like this [i.e., the honey bitter].

The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: The principle in this [matter] is that the human being contains limits and aspects [i.e., the senses]. Each aspect of the human being [i.e., each faculty of perception] corresponds to one aspect from what is perceived. Through this aspect, the human being cannot perceive anything other than that which corresponds to it. If an impairment occurs in the aspect through which one perceives its corresponding aspect, or if something conceals its corresponding aspect, then a portion of [both] disappears. Thus, it is as if there has been a perception through an irrelevant aspect. In this case, there are three options:

i) If the aspect [i.e., the faculty of perception] is completely transformed, nothing about the object may be perceived.

ii) [If the aspect] works properly and all veils are removed, the truth of the object is perceived through it.

iii) Or a mixture [of these two occurs, i.e., there is neither a clear perception nor a complete loss of perception]. Perception varies according to these degrees. All this holds true of the senses and is known through the senses. Thus, there is no real conflict in sensory knowledge. *Strength comes from God alone.*

4) Then, the useless things al-Nazzām has cited against the Sumanīs serve no purpose. For example, he claims: The nature of fish is dominated by wetness and coldness. Therefore, if [the fish] comes ashore, since heat



and dryness dominate [on the land], these two will overcome wetness and moistness, destroying the fish. Similarly, for every two contrary natures, if one dominates the other, it destroys it. Such is the case with the bird in the sky and with the otter. The constitution of the [otter] is more moderate than that of the fish, so it lives both in water and on land. The bat's eyesight is weak, and not strong: the glare of the Sun eliminates its sense of sight. This is similar to how one gets dazzled when one gazes at the Sun. When the Sun sets, that which weakens one's vision departs, and one sees. But when it gets really dark, one cannot see [once more]. The lion is strong in its vision. It sees more in the daytime than the others do. Similarly, what hinders its vision at night [i.e., darkness] is less than what hinders others.

Abu Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) said: All [these words of al-Nazzām] are in vain. In fact, what needs to be said is that [these animals] have been created this way and disposed to have such a nature. Some bodily substances fly in the sky, others swim in the water, and a third walk on the face of earth. To take the trouble to provide an explanation for such things is to rule over the Lord of the Worlds, and to explain that which is not allowed for the [human being] and that which he cannot comprehend. This is not the kind of investigation into the substances that belongs to the Law.<sup>690</sup> *Strength comes from God alone.*

5) Then, [the Sophist] opposes himself [i.e., his own position] with what the sleeper sees [in his dream], such that he turns against what he sees [i.e., understanding it cannot be real]. [He says]: Maybe the state of the wakeful is similar, or one does not know [his state of sleep] from [his state of wakefulness]. Thus, he claims that whoever distinguishes between [sleep and wakefulness] sees what is not rationally sound in the state of sleep. For example, one sees himself as dead [in sleep], and the dead have no awareness [but in seeing oneself as dead one has awareness]. Or one sees his head drop into his lap [i.e., in drowsiness] and the like of it that cannot be seen when awake.<sup>691</sup>

690 Al-Māturīdī's point seems to be that the human being is not religiously tasked with gaining detailed knowledge of the natures of particular animals in order to debate with atheists about the creator of the world. What is important is rather the general metaphysical principles about natures that allow for the kinds of arguments that he makes in *The Book of Monotheism*.

691 The argument here is that the sophist brings forward a classic skeptical move: just as

If it is said: How does the sleeping person imagine that which is impossible, though it has not been established in the imagination?

It is answered: When one sees himself in sleep, he does not believe that he is [both] alive and dead, and this is what is impossible. Likewise, if he sees his head on his lap, he does not imagine that [his head] is in two places [i.e., on his lap and being used to seeing it].

[He]<sup>692</sup> claims that the knowledge that the things seen while awake are true and the things seen in sleep are false is an acquired [kind of knowledge]. The evidence for this is what I have mentioned [i.e., the fact that one sees in sleep what the mind regards as impossible]. He adds: Sometimes one also sees correct things while dreaming. This is due to an angel who shows him it, or due to being roused to wakefulness or partial wakefulness.

6) The Jurist (may God have mercy on him) said: The basic principle on this [issue] is the first [explanation]: A sleeping person has an impairment [i.e., lack of waking consciousness] that he is aware of and knows by his wakefulness. That [knowledge of the sleeping state] is the right of the senses. One sees in a compelled way while sleeping, but not when awake. Likewise, the pain of the beating that one suffers while awake remains, and one is aware of the pleasure in what one eats. There is no issue in these matters between us and these people [i.e., the Sophists]. The point where we differ from them is that we regard the reality of waking awareness and its verification necessary according to that which we have mentioned [i.e., the certainty of sense perception]. That [certainty of sense perception] only changes due to the occurrence of impairments.

To summarize, nature[s], stars or nutrition cannot generate [the world] in this way, nor is there in them [the power] to necessitate it. Each of these [three things] has benefits and harms. In that case, the like of that in which superiority and moderation have been realized [i.e., the world],

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dreams appear real until one realizes they are not, why cannot the waking world be the same? This opposes the sophist's own position because the basis for realizing that a dream is not real is some element of rational impossibility. As al-Māturīdī goes on to explain, the waking world cannot be revealed as impossible in the same way.

692 Dialectically, this would be the turn of the Sophist to speak. But as it is an affirmation of knowledge, yet uses the language of "claiming", it may be the words of Ibn Shabīb whose reported speech of debates with the Sophists form the basis of al-Māturīdī's commentary.



does not originate by nature or through the stars, because it has emerged from wisdom and perfection. Nature cannot necessitate that, as has already been explained. *God alone leads to success.*

#### 4.11. Enquiry into the Characteristic of the Doctrines of the Dualists: [A Critique of the Doctrines of the Manichaeans]

1) The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: The Manichaeans claim that things, in their present state, are composed of a mixture of light and darkness, and these two were separate at first. Accordingly, light is above and infinite in the four directions, namely north, south, east and west; darkness is the same below, but finite in the direction it meets [light]. Thus, darkness encroached upon light, and the two mixed. The world [has been formed] by the mixing of these two according to the amount of mixing. Each of [light and darkness] has five kinds: red, white, yellow, black, and green. Those from these kinds that come from the substance of light are good, whereas those coming from the substance of darkness are evil. Likewise, each of [light and darkness] has five senses: hearing, sight, taste, smell, and touch. What the substance of light perceives through them is good, while what the substance of darkness perceives is bad. Light has a soul, and darkness has a soul. The soul of darkness is named Hamāma,<sup>693</sup> which is a serpent and has prevailed over the world to imprison light in itself [i.e., darkness]. Light is not sapient; everything that comes from it is by nature and is all good. In contrast, al-Hamāma is sapient.<sup>694</sup> [Light and darkness] will each retreat into its own realm. Then, the highest of things is found to be the purest, just as the lowest is the cloudiest. Lightness and heaviness are also from their natures, and the relationship between them is mutual repulsion. For, while lightness ascends upwards, heaviness descends downwards, so endless time passes. Since this is the case with [light and darkness], they escape from the aspect of finitude just as they became mixed.

693 This name, which comes from the word *hamm*, meaning to plan, to intend or to worry. It is first introduced without the definite article, though thereafter al-Hamāma is used.

694 Whereas both light and darkness are held by the Manichaeans to have the five senses, it is only the soul of darkness, Hamāma, which is able to act with true sapience, i.e., with choice rather than nature.

2) The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: Whoever ponders [this] doctrine finds it contradictory altogether, and it takes no more than explaining it to show that it is false.

i) The first proof for [the falsity of this teaching] is that it removes finitude from one aspect and affirms it from another. Thus, it makes the finite into the infinite, since the end is a limit and [whatever has a] limit is shorter than what is greater than it, which means that another governs it. This is evidence for the origination of a side of [the world]. This is a part, and it is far-fetched for the being of the totality of [its] finite parts to be infinite. For this meaning [i.e., finitude] is contained in every part [of the whole] and connects [to it]. In the aspects where each of [light and darkness] is infinite, the other is either present [or not]. [If the other is present], the proposition that they are mixed only from one side has been refuted; on the contrary, they are both mixed apart from one side, hence they are mixed [in full]. If each of [light and darkness] continues in the four directions possessed by the other, then it becomes finite in these directions.<sup>695</sup> *God alone leads to success.*

ii) If the nature of the low is to descend and the nature of the high is to ascend – which is the meaning of mutual repulsion, and to it returns the final end – how can the low move to ascend? [Ascension] is the nature of the high and the pure, and it is the meaning of goodness. In this case, [in which the low ascends], then both [ascent and descent] have come from the low, which invalidates the reason to require the doctrine of dualism [i.e., the idea that good and evil cannot originate from the same principle].

iii) Then, what should emerge from the high is ascent, but it did not fulfill this and could not keep itself away and rise above a substance that descends. The world has been created because of its imprisonment. So, how do they expect [light] to escape from al-Hamāma? In addition, al-Hamāma is sapient and active, it has caught, tied and imprisoned [light] with tricks. [Light], on the other hand, has no power to escape, and even when it was

695 In short, al-Māturīdī argues that the Dualist invocation of both the infinite expanse of light and darkness and their finitude in meeting, thereby forming the finite world, is contradictory. It is impossible for each of the two principles to hold onto its infinitude in all directions while having a side by which it can finitely mix in the required manner.



free from [al-Hamāma], could not stay away from it due to its nature. So, how can it free itself after being caught? However, [the Manichaean] may say that al-Hamāma lets [light] go. In this case, he makes [darkness] into an agent of good.

iv) One should add: If the substance of darkness has seen, noticed and imprisoned light, then it is [the substance of darkness] that has the qualities of knowledge and sight, and not [light, since it] does not see [darkness] to protect itself from it, nor does it know how to get rid of its dominance. Thus, all qualities such as knowing, seeing, power, independence and nobility are in the substance of darkness, whereas submission, ignorance, incapacity, lowliness and disgrace are in the substance of light. If all these are good and all the first [group] are bad, then how perceptive is your understanding of good and evil!

v) Again, according to you, the action of light is by nature, whereas that of al-Hamāma is by choice, and it is al-Hamāma who created the world. Dualism has been destroyed: the whole world is the act of one [rather than two], but it has confused its parts with the parts of the other. If [light] was to become like [darkness, i.e., if it became an independent ontological principle or creator like darkness] just because [darkness] acted upon it, and thus dualism was realized, every natural being would be an agent by which the world has originated, and so the doctrine would be of innumerable [creators and not dualism].

vi) Then, if it is darkness that encroaches upon light and it is light that is saved from it, then it is impossible for this salvation to happen through the substance [of light] because it could not stay away from darkness through its [substance]. Additionally, it is necessary to free parts of [light] from the imprisonment of al-Hamāma, and [the light], which has been freed from darkness, has no place above light to go. Since other than this side, [which is next to darkness], is infinite, and [light] is freed, it returns to infinity and cannot find a place for itself to stand. The only meaning of salvation, then, is that darkness drives [light] away from itself, and thus the repulsion [of light] would be good because its confinement was evil. In addition, when the parts [of light] have been repelled [from darkness], above these parts are only the parts [of light]. Therefore, some of [the parts of

light] will interpenetrate [i.e., light that has been repelled by darkness will mix with other light], which is an end [i.e., a side that is assumed to be infinite will be finite]. However, [the darkness] initially imprisoned [light] in its own substance, then subjugated all light and made it a prison to hold its enemy. Thus, [light] has become its own enemy as a substance of imprisonment for itself.

vii) One should add: Darkness has no limit except for the one in the direction of mixing. So, where will [light] go when it is freed? This explains why [its] salvation is meaningless. *Strength comes from God alone.*

3) The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: Then, one cannot help but be surprised at the doctrine of [the Dualists] when they say that all the good in the world has come from the substance of light. But how may good come from it when it is subjugated and imprisoned? The act all comes from [darkness] to imprison light. Therefore, the only act that arises from light is to remain in confinement and under the yoke of [darkness]. So, how may good come from [light], except that one sees that [good] in the rest of the parts [of light] that were never occupied, in which case [other] parts of [light] remain in the confinement of [darkness], which is evil. When will the kingdom of good arrive with all of [light] free and unhindered?

Then, it leads to a contradiction that they regard [light and darkness] separate from each other by substance. So, it is impossible for the two to mix while they are separate in substance and each subsists in its own state, because they do not see mixing as other [than either previous state]. For it is said to them: Is it not that mixing takes place after it did not? The answer must be, "Yes, certainly!"

It is said: [Is the act of mixing] light, darkness, or other than them both? It is impossible [for mixing to be light or darkness], for in that case it would affirm mixing and separation to be the same principle. If this were possible, it would be possible for the two [that is, mixing and separation] to be together. It is clear [that this is impossible]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

4) Then, [the Dualists] affirm that there is a limit at the point [of contact between light and darkness]. According to this, light and darkness either touch each other in eternity, or they do not. If they touch each other, one says: If the two came into contact temporally, the temporality of the



part necessitates [the temporality] of the whole on the basis of the indication of the visible world to the unseen [i.e., since the visible parts that come into contact are temporal, then the entirety of the unseen world must be the same].<sup>696</sup> If they touch each other [in eternity], either one of them must increase until it mixes with the other or it must separate from the other until it enters into itself. No matter which one has taken place, there is either an increase which did not exist before or there is a cutting and insertion in the substance. Therefore, the doctrine that the substance is infinite has been refuted because if its parts were infinite, it would be impossible for the other to interpenetrate with it and mix with it. So, it is established that it is finite as it accepts mixing [because if one was infinite, the other would never be able to spread sufficiently to mix with it]. Moreover, there is a low possibility that darkness, with its thickness, encroaches on light, with its thinness, so that it takes possession of it, because something thick cannot settle within that which is filled with something thin. If [the one encroaching] had been light [and darkness had been the thing which it filled], it would have committed evil and imprisoned itself, though the thick thing [i.e., darkness] remained a single substance. Something thin can only find a passage through something thick when the latter consists of different substances between which remain gaps. However, it is impossible [to penetrate] the one whose state is as mentioned above [that is, that which is filled]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

5) If [light and darkness] preceded the origination of mixing after it did not exist, [the mixing] took place:

i) Either through one or both of [light and darkness], and this involves a possibility of temporality, hence the totality of [light and dark] is the like of it [i.e., temporal].

ii) Or [the mixing happened] through neither of them, in which case the existence of a third thing is established.

iii) Or [mixing] was already the case for them both, in which case it is necessary to negate the separation [of light and darkness to begin with].

<sup>696</sup> Note that this relies on a version of the indication of the visible world to the unseen that al-Māturidī criticises for not making the proper contrastive inferences between the two in this circumstance. See 2.5.1 (4).



iv) Or darkness by itself has encroached [into light], so that moment [i.e., the purported moment of mixing] will not have more priority than the previous one. If nothing new has occurred in the two unmixed parts, but [mixing] has occurred, why has this mixing not occurred in it all?

6) Additionally, [the mix of light and darkness] is not free from separation since mixing occurs by nature, which does not change. So, it happens that [the mixture] continues like this [i.e., to also separate] forever.<sup>697</sup> He [Ibn Shabīb] has spoken at length about the kinds of natures, but he has observed that darkness acts by choice. Accordingly, it is baseless to talk of nature [due to the opposition between choice and nature]. Again, he narrated from the [Manichaeans] that darkness moved until it encroached [upon light] and entered it. If they say this has been happening forever, this is the speech of eternalism, whereas if they say that there was a beginning [to the mixture], temporality is necessary. *God alone leads to success.*

7) Then, there is complete ignorance in their statement: [Light and darkness] become free due to the nature of the heavy to descend and the nature of the light to ascend. Then, despite this [opposite] nature in the beginning, [light and darkness] mixed together. But if [light and darkness] each did not have the nature of the other in heaviness and lightness, mixing would not be possible. If this were possible, it would show that two natures coexisted in each of them. *Strength comes from God alone.*

If each of the two principles could do both of the matters [that is, ascend and descend], it could also do both good and evil. [In this case,] the second principle is negated. *Strength comes from God alone.*

8) Since [the Manichaeans] argue that [light and darkness] have contrary natures, they must accept that the state of one is mixing and the state of the other is separation. Being upon this state has overcome one of them. Then, according to them, once [light and darkness] separate, they do not mix again. How do they know this? We know with certainty that their joining is not observed, so how does separation with effort exist? How do they know that [light and darkness] are forever separated and united, and likewise in past eternity? In this case, the [dualism] of light and darkness has been refuted.

<sup>697</sup> Just as mixing between light and dark would continue forever by nature, the resulting mixture, without God to hold together its repelling natures, would also separate forever, resulting in an apparent contradiction.



Then, this judgment [of the Manichaeans] is surprising because they have not been informed about the [eternal] states [of light and darkness] and only have to go on what is already with them about their substances. And there is not for [light and darkness] prior knowledge about mixing and the howness of separation. *God alone leads to success.*

Thereupon, what the [the Manichaeans] have said regarding the termination of the beginning and end of the world without there being an infinity of worlds produced one from another should be prosecuted in every section, because that [must be shown] with evidence. The same is the case [with the claim that light and darkness] mix and separate. [When they have been questioned like this, the Manichaeans] will know their obstinacy. Everything you [Manichaeans] see is a mixture of good and evil and you have not received any reports that are likely to be true on this matter.

9) If [the Manichaeans] say: We know with evidence that the condition of things is separation, and everything returns to the source of its substance.

Shaykh Abū Manṣūr (may God have mercy on him) replies: On the contrary, the condition of things is to join [and not to separate].<sup>698</sup> Therefore, everything returns to the source of its substance. If this has happened, [the things] have joined. So, accept that [joining] as everlasting. It may also be said: Since separation is disintegration [and loss of power], whereas joining is consolidation and power, why should the state of things not be joining? *Strength comes from God alone.* If it were possible to affirm something as being from the substance of the visible world, despite lacking evidence for it, then it would be possible to assert, by relying on the action of the senses, [the opposite] of what is familiar or to perceive with the opposites of the [organs] of perception. [But this is absurd!]

One may oppose the Manichaeans on the basis of their words: "Only good emerges from light and only evil emerges from darkness." Let us suppose that one commits a murder and then confesses his guilt. Now, if he has really murdered, he has spoken the truth and with [this act of confession]

<sup>698</sup> As al-Māturīdī elsewhere explains the nature of things to pull apart (e.g., 2.1.2 (3)), he may be referring to their condition as observed in the world in which God joins them together in bodies. In his debate with the Manichaeans, he cannot presuppose God's existence, but he can argue on the basis of the coherent organization of things.

he has done a good deed after the bad one. On the other hand, if he is not the murderer, he has lied and lying is bad. Yet good has come from him in refraining from murder.

Their [next] statement is [equally false]: "One sense cannot perceive what another sense perceives." Then, one says, "I have heard" of what he has heard and, "I have seen" of what he has seen. However, that through which he said that he saw, and he heard [i.e., his mouth and tongue] is not the same as that through which he heard and he saw [i.e., his ears and eyes]. And this is the answer [one may give about the organ] through which no perception has been made.

The Manichaean is asked about the blackness of darkness when it is increased upon [contact with] the blackness of light, is there an increase in the total blackness? If they say, "No, [it does not increase]", they describe something that has multiplied as having not multiplied. If they say, "[Yes, the blackness in question] has increased," we ask, "Is it light, darkness, or another thing [that has increased]?" If either of the first two are said [in answer], then light or darkness has increased. Yet, this is far-fetched, because each of [light and darkness] has increased within the other substance.<sup>699</sup> If the answer is, "It is a thing other than the two [i.e., light and darkness]", the existence of a thing other than the two has been accepted.

Then, how do they know that there is none other than those five kinds [that is, five colors] in light and darkness? However, since [light and darkness] are infinite, they do not know all the parts of them. If he answers that he infers knowledge of the unseen from the visible world, he abandons the claim that separation and finitude have disappeared because he has not seen them. If he says, "We know through the messengers," it is said: The messengers are parts of light, and darkness is an obstacle. How, then, can you be sure that darkness did not hinder and did not hide reports about other than the five kinds, and so they are not known [although they exist]? If he claims that the first one [i.e., light] perceives with each sense what he perceives with the other senses, their claim for the five senses [as possessed by light] has been refuted, and it results in [light] having a single [sense]. Then, an

<sup>699</sup> This implausibility is due to the increase of the property of one of the principles whilst in a mixture with its opposite.



incapacity [in perception] may occur despite the presence of hearing, and the same is true for the rest of [the senses]. This affirms the difference [between various senses].

Then, based on the senses of darkness, one may object [to the Manichaeans]. That is, the [senses of darkness] perceive what the senses of light perceive, and everything is as it is upon its state. Now, how can one of the two perceptions be good and the other bad? Then he [Ibn Shabīb] objects based on the forgiveness of sin,<sup>700</sup> asking to whom this act of forgiveness belongs. If it is said that it is the act of light, that benefits the enemy, therefore it is bad. If [the agent] is from darkness and forgives, then it is goodness.

10) The basic principle is that we find in the visible world that the ignorant learns, the erroneous regrets and the speaker retracts his statement. If the [person who does] the second is he [who does] the first, it has been established that two opposite acts have [originated] from one. [If it is] otherwise, then the falsehood of the good<sup>701</sup> is established in the three aspects [i.e., due to a lack of learning, regret and retraction]. *God alone leads to success.*

#### [4.12. A Critique of the Doctrines of the Bardaisanites]

1) The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: The doctrines of the Bardaisanites<sup>702</sup> are similar to that of the Manichaeans in principle. However, the [Bardaisanites] say that light is completely white, and darkness is completely black; light is alive, and has mixed with darkness, whereas darkness is dead. Since darkness is hard in the direction in which it encounters [light], it [i.e., light] wanted to mix with [darkness] to govern it in such a way that it would soften. A soft thing may become hardened [just as a hard thing may become softened]. For example, if the blade of a saw is worked with a file, it will become hard, and if the teeth are removed and its parts flattened, it will become soft.

700 Reading *dhamm* with K, 163. In TA, 232, it is read *damm* (blood), referring to forgiveness of the murderer.

701 Reading *al-khayr* with K, 163.

702 The Bardaisanites or Daysāniyya are followers of the teachings of Bardaisan, known in Arabic as Ibn Dayṣān (d. 201 CE). He professed a syncretic dualism that included elements of Christianity and other religious traditions of his time.

2) Others have said: No, on the contrary, [light] was disturbed by [darkness], so it drove it away from itself. So, [light] mixed with [darkness] like one mired in mud; the harder one tries to get out of it, the deeper one sinks into it. Motion comes from light, whereas its opposite [i.e., darkness] stands still because they are in opposition to each other. Accordingly, [the Bardaisanites] took two principles as necessary, light and darkness, and two derivatives, the motion and sensation of light, and the stillness and insensibility of darkness, without affirming anything other than light and darkness.

3) The Jurist (may God have mercy on him) said: We have quoted their words so that you know God's hatred towards whoever chooses His enmity, swerves from His obedience, does not reflect upon His creatures with a thought submissive to Him, seeking help from Him to enable him to be successful in His religion and to open for him the door of reality. On the contrary, [such a person] inclines towards the world, and relies on it and on the desires of his lower soul. Since he fails to supplicate to Him and does not desire other than [the world] to which he turns, [God] entrusts him to his lower soul and does not protect him from his enemy. *We ask God alone for help.*

4) The principle is that God, Mighty and Majestic, destroys His servant by means of a thing that causes the servant to deny Him and turn away from obedience to Him, fearing due to a thing that attaches to him. He destroys [the servant] by his attachment due to his desire to be rid of it. Hence, [the Bardaisanites] have inclined towards dualism because they speculated that no evil could come from the [source] of good, assuming that [good and evil] had two separate origins. Then, they have made it so the source of good according to them results in evil, and the source of evil results in good. This is because they consider light ignorant about the purposes that it will reach. According to one of two positions, [light] wanted to remove the harm of something [i.e., darkness] but [the latter] stayed with it. [Light] does not know that it is not capable of [removing harm] and it does not know that [darkness] will remain despite the objective to remove it. Moreover, it cannot become free of it when it is captive to it. [Light] came to [darkness] to soften its hardness and to remove its harm while ignorant about its lack of power over it.



On the other hand, according to the teaching of Mani [the second of the two views mentioned above], darkness encroached into light [rather than light into darkness], imprisoned it in its jail and bound it in fetters, so that [light] could not know where it came from and could not be saved. The beginning of every good, the endpoint of knowledge, and the encompassing and attainment of every good is only possible by having power over it. However, they removed from light both [good and evil], attributing them to darkness. Thus, they destroyed all that they built [by saying]: "The whole of goodness belongs to the whole of them [i.e., belongs to light and darkness together]." Thus, they excluded [light] from the greatest good and [darkness] from the greatest evil, and then attributed both to a single thing, but they adopted dualism for it. Hence, it has become clear that every group will perish by means of what they think is salvation. *God alone leads to success.*

5) One should add that if it were necessary to adopt two principles because of the two aspects [i.e., good and evil], it would be necessary to adopt four principles like the natures [i.e., hot, cold, wet and dry].<sup>703</sup> For the natures are opposites, each of them harming the others. If one [adopts four principles] because of the four [natures], one must adopt six [principles] because every bodily thing has six sides. That requires adopting seven principles because [the matter that bears these sides] is not characterized by any side that precedes it. Or [it is necessary to adopt] five principles because it is the fifth one in which these four natures are united that itself is not characterized by heat and coldness. If it had been as the Dualists said, the third principle should have been accepted, because there were two principles [light and darkness] and the world did not exist, nor did good and evil. It is impossible for a thing that is separate by its essence to mix by its essence; as such a thing has no necessity for joining or mutual nullification [i.e., splitting apart after being joined]. Therefore, it has been established that [joining and separation] have occurred due to one other than [light and darkness], and good and evil come into existence through it. Thus, their teaching has been refuted in the very way that they want to establish it.

703 Al-Māturīdī here leaves critique of the Bardaisanites to take up general critique of dualism until the end of the section.



Then, the doctrine of the One does not compel its holder to adopt another principle in [a different] aspect. The source of this [misconception] is that the intellects of [the Dualists] do not reach the level to perceive the wisdom of lordship in things. They thought that the Lord could be characterized like themselves with needs, desires, the possibility of impairments and the flaw of infirmity. So, they measured His acts through that which they gauged the wisdom of their actions. However, had they reflected upon their own state in terms of the necessary veils that prevent them from encompassing things, including their own interests to which they devoted most of their toil, they would have realized that ignorance prevented them from perceiving the wisdom in [His actions]. In fact, it is [the Dualists] who should best understand this [state of prevention] because they claim that the world consists of a mixture of light and darkness. Thus, every part of light is mixed with a part of darkness. And darkness is also a veil [that prevents people from seeing the wisdom in things]. Hence, darkness prevails over light. Therefore, anything good that is hoped to start from [light] is dominated by darkness and the latter prevents the former from being seen openly by the followers of the sect. In that case, how is it that [the Dualists] reach knowledge and awareness of the way of wisdom, so that they can claim evil [for darkness]?

What is astounding is that although their light is self-subsistent and pure from the stains of darkness, it was unable to know the distress, narrowness, ignorance and incapacity contained in the mixture. Then, [the Dualists] hope that when a part of light separates from its own substance and falls into the hands of the enemy, the enemy will release it in accordance with the wisdom that light could not reach when it was complete. In fact, the Dualist ought not to lay claim to wisdom, debate with its people or start with it, because he turns to two substances, evil and good, in his own soul. For him, such is the case with everyone. Now, if [the Dualist] commencing in [wisdom] has the substance of light and so does the one that he speaks with, then these are two wise people from whom nothing is hidden. So, there is no meaning to their discourse when they are both like this [because one has no knowledge to provide for the other, since both already have knowledge of everything]. Or [the two in question] have the substance of darkness. In this case, it is impossible that both would have



wisdom. Or one has the substance of light and the other has darkness. In this case, one cannot be ignorant, whereas the other cannot possess knowledge. Therefore, this talk would be futile and meaningless. *Strength comes from God alone.*

6) The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: Then, the principle is that whoever performs an action that does not benefit or is for its own destruction or extinction is blameworthy. God, exalted is He, does not benefit from the things He has created because He is above needs and is independent of others by Himself. Therefore, the idea that His action will be for His benefit is false. Then, were His action for the sole purpose of destruction, His creation would be meaningless. Hence, it has been established that the creation and existence of the world are for certain purposes. Then, He created some creatures that He did not give the ability to discern and perceive the purposes of things. Therefore, it is established that He did not create these beings for themselves. He has also created creatures who are aware of [the purposes of things] and seek the benefit of the purposes with all their actions; even the one whose action departs from that is still wise in his action since he is in need of everyone else. Thus, they must love [Him] so as not to waste the blessings of the intellect granted by the Creator, through which they perceive the purposes of things. For if they were left alone and governed themselves, they would not be content with themselves in terms of change that neither produced benefit nor praise, and they would even see those amongst them who act like this as foolish and ignorant.

As what we have mentioned is necessary, wisdom requires creating both the harmful and the beneficial, the substance that may give pain and pleasure, and pain and pleasure [themselves]. In this way, people know what their souls desire and shrink from, so they are wary or eager with its like depending on what they are being tested with. Also, they will know the benefit and harm, without which their creation would be meaningless. Therefore, God has created them differently [from each other] for these two [reasons, i.e., benefit and harm]. Again, by His grace, He has created every substance in such a way that it could be both beneficial or harmful and carry [these benefits and harms] to other things, and He brought benefit to every substance from another one with harms. Thus, He lets the one who reflects know that the governor of all substances is one, and that were

there different rulers, the creatures would be mutually repelled. For if only good would come from the substance of good and only evil from the substance of evil, the action of each would form part of the other's action and in doing so they would corrupt each other. The fact that [the world] is harmonious and that the benefits of its parts are interconnected indicates the falsity of this.

If we do not accept that everything [i.e., including the good and the bad together] belongs to a single agent, it is impossible for us to accept there to be several. Since no one of the agents can do on its own that which is evident<sup>704</sup> to indicate to [the creator], and there cannot be a more evident sign to signify [the creator's existence], then in such a case the due right to know [the creator] and its state is not obligatory. So, knowledge is corrupted completely due to ignorance about the source of all types of knowledge and its branches.

One should add: If one of the two substances benefits a thing, the other harms it, which means that the harmful and beneficial meet in the same locus. So, the benefit definitely disappears because next to it there is a thing blocking it. In the existence of the world and everything in it there is a benefit, which is the real evidence that the governor of it all is one. For, by His grace, He prevents every harmful thing from acting in terms of its harm, and thus makes it possible for the benefit He wills to reach whomsoever He wills. Such is the story about one whom He wills to harm [He hinders the benefit of the beneficial thing and makes it possible for the harm to reach whomsoever He wills]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

7) It is known that intellect has not been constituted to eat and drink. That which does not have an intellect is ahead of that which does in this regard. In addition, a folk who refrain from eating and drinking, namely angels, have a mighty station in their hearts. So, it has been established that [intellects] are created for admonition and reflection because thinking includes praiseworthy and noble results. Therefore, it was necessary to create different substances as a requirement of wisdom, so that the way of admonition would be complete, and the reality of reflection would be abundant. *Strength comes from God alone.*

704 Reading *bādin* with K, 167.



As is known, one who performs both things [i.e., both the harmful and the beneficial] in the visible world is more perfect. Furthermore, if one does not know what harms him, he cannot avoid it. In that case, the creation of [benefit and harm] in terms of wisdom is more necessary and perfect than the creation of only one of them. In addition, [the creation of benefit and harm together] signifies the independence of the agent, the fullness of His power, and His knowledge of what is appropriate for everything to be. *Strength comes from God alone.*

8) If there was no evidence for the teachings of the People of Monotheism besides the truth of those who invited others [to accept these teachings], that is the messengers with their illuminated proofs, which none of the deniers of the One Creator possess, that would be sufficient. It is impossible to think otherwise because everything with its substance bears witness that it is temporal and that it was originated by a wise creator. Had the atheists not been obstinate in claiming that bodily substances are eternal, they would have had no way to support [their claim] but to imitate one who has no evidence or who takes his folly – that is, his inability to comprehend the creation of something out of nothing – as evidence for himself. Undoubtedly, every [atheist] is aware that he knows things after he did not, that he has power over things after he did not, and that he becomes independent of things after he was dependent upon them. Thus, one who has this quality should not trust his own opinion and should not follow what his intellect points to.

People who attribute [the origination of the world] to the natures that cannot apprehend the things that have been generated from themselves, and similarly to the stars, or to more than one agent who began their affair ignorant and blind, or who tend to imitate contradictory and contrary words about the eternity of things in their present state, how – with these ignorant foundations of which they are the derivatives – do they have intellect, or comprehend the realities of things? Thus, they cannot say that in a certain thing or its method there is wisdom or folly. *Strength comes from God alone.*

9) What calls the Dualists to deny the origination of something from nothing is that it is impossible to conceive of it in the intellect, or they take as a criterion what they observe amongst themselves in recognizing

wisdom in the intellect. Had they only known that if their own doctrine on the origins of the world were measured with the same criterion of inconceivability to the imagination, it would be like [the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*] which they denied; or [had they known] that things they affirm, such as the soul, the intellect, and the senses, or their judgments, are inconceivable to the imagination like that which they deny; then, based on what they learned through reports that they [themselves] came into existence after they did not exist, they knew that the existence of things from nothing has more right to be ascribed to the one who [created] the whole world. And had they known [God's] independence, power and exaltation above the attributes of creatures, their hearts would not have been anguished due to their failure to perceive the wisdom in His creation. *We rely on God and ask Him for help.*

It is narrated from Ja'far b. Ḥarb<sup>705</sup> that he asked a Dualist about the situation of one who killed another unjustly and then apologized to [his kin] and confessed to the crime... so, he cornered him with his second [i.e., good] act. On the other hand, if he was not from the substance of the first act [i.e., murdering the victim], then the act of lying will arise from light, which is evil. The Dualist wrote this question to his chief, who replied as follows: This is like one whose beast kicks, but himself apologizes. So, Ja'far said: [The owner of the animal apologized] to share that person's pain. If he apologized in a real sense, he would be ignorant. However, the case is different if he apologizes for bringing the animal too close to him [and indirectly causing it to kick him]. [Upon this answer], the man became a Muslim, and it is right for him to do so. What Ibn Ḥarb has said is necessary. *Strength comes from God alone.*

10) Then, this matter is an error according to the doctrine of the Mu'tazila because, according to their teaching, there is no evil in God's creation; a thing may only be named evil metaphorically. Therefore, the [only] way for the Mu'tazila to argue with the Dualists in eliminating what they think is evil is that the thing in question is evil [i.e., the Mu'tazila themselves must first admit that there really is evil in beings]. It is impossible and

705 Ja'far b. Ḥarb (d. 236/850) was a Baghdadi Mu'tazili and is known to have been involved in developing arguments for the purpose of debates with dualists. See van Ess, *Theology and Society*, Vol. 4, 81.



false for the [Mu'tazila] to make a Dualist into a Muslim and force him to accept the doctrine of the One Creator through an aspect by which [good and evil] together exist without God Most High and by which they [indicate] the creator after the negation of that doctrine [i.e., their existence without God]. For this approach establishes His being known and oneness through the creation of good and evil together. Then, by negating one of [good and evil] in reality [the Mu'tazili] returns to the doctrine of the Dualists: That what God creates evil through in reality is other than that through which He creates good. Thus, the [Mu'tazili] is trapped in a dualistic understanding of monotheism.<sup>706</sup> The reason for their statements in this matter is that they deny that the deeds of the servants have been created [by God] by resorting to the excuse that they contain sins, acts of disobedience and evils. They are answered that He creates evil from among the substances, Yet He is not named due to this evil and sinful, nor is He named a corrupter even though He corrupts things. Likewise, when He creates acts of evil and corruption, He is not named by them. Their answer to this would be that the substances are named evil figuratively, and not literally; they are not evil in reality.

11) As for us, we say that God, Mighty and Majestic, is the creator of the substance of evil and good, and the creator of the acts of creatures, whether they are evil or good. It is impossible for a thing that He did not create to be under His dominion. Otherwise, He will have a partner in His sovereignty and an equal in creating the world. God is lofty and exalted above this. Again, we say that the creation of the creatures is not identical with the creatures, nor is His action [identical with the creatures]. His actions are not described as evil and good, nor is He described by His action being good or evil because He is described by His own action. We do not say that He is the doer of good or evil. One whose deed is this in reality is named by that act. *Strength comes from God alone.*

706 The denial of the polemical grounds for the Mu'tazila to refute dualism may seem puzzling given that Ja'far b. Harb is a known Mu'tazili who al-Maturidi seems to support on this point. The idea seems to be that, notwithstanding the cogency of his argument, the Mu'tazila have a problem in making such an argument in the light of their overall theology. They become stuck in the following dilemma: either they deny evil entirely, in which case they have no basis to critique the Dualist, or they accept evil, but not created by God, in which case they end up as dualists themselves.

The creation of harmful substances, foul appearances and the creation of impairments in the senses are a requirement of [God's] wisdom because by it all of humanity believes in something that is hidden from their senses, whether it is through negation or affirmation.<sup>707</sup> Some of [the people] have obeyed in religion, while others remained ignorant and fulfilled their desires. If [God] had not created the things we have mentioned [that is, harmful substances, foul appearances and impairments] in the things perceived by the senses, [people] would not be able to recognize the foul from the pleasant and the harmful from the beneficial. And if they had not apprehended them, it would not be possible for their intellects to distinguish the foul from the good and the harmful from the pleasurable. Hence, He has created in this way, so that people could take what they perceive with their senses as an analogy of what they cannot perceive. This is so every believed thing that is veiled from sight becomes known just as it is by what is witnessed [in the world]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

12) Another point that refutes the Dualists is that despite their difference of opinion, they agree that they speak through the substance of light in all their speech and accept [what is said] through it. Thus, if they have told the truth, all their difference of opinion is due to [the substance of light]. If they have lied, the whole lie is also because of it. If some of them have told the truth and some of them have lied, it has been established that one who is from the substance of darkness has preferred light and even has chosen to belong to light rather than darkness. To prefer the virtuous is good according to the testimony of the intellects. In this case, the [Dualist] doctrine, with a source that is evil from which nothing else comes, and one that is good, from which nothing else comes, has been refuted. *Strength comes from God alone.*

#### [4.13. A Critique of the Doctrines of the Marcionites]

1) The Marcionites say that light is high, and darkness is low, and there is an intermediary between the two, which is neither light nor darkness, and that is the human being who has sense and perception. According to them, the human being is the life in the body. These three [i.e., light,

<sup>707</sup> See 2.3 (3).



darkness, and the human] were merged into one after they were separated. Each of them is parallel to what lies adjacent to it just as the Sun is parallel to the upward shadow. Accordingly, the intermediary [i.e., the human being] is parallel to light, and his lower part is parallel to darkness. For the first two groups [of the Dualists, i.e., the Manichaeans and the Bardaisanites], the two substances [i.e., light and darkness] are parallel.

2) As for the Sabians,<sup>708</sup> their teaching is similar to that of the Manichaeans. However, there is an insignificant difference between the two teachings, as has been pointed out by Ibn Shabīb. The Manichaeans claim that light moves from the north and meets darkness in the south, while darkness moves from the south and meets light in the north. Thus, the meeting takes place in such a way that part of darkness enters light and [light and darkness] are infinite in the rest of the directions. [Ibn Shabīb] directed similar criticisms at [the Sabians] as he had directed at the Dualists, asking after the source of what these two groups asserted.

Then, the intermediary is either [an aspect of the] governance through which the state of the world has been formed or [the world] has been generated from it through joining. If [the world has been generated] through governance, the claim that light and darkness mixed has been refuted because how could they mix when [the intermediary] stands between them? In fact, the characteristic of darkness is descent and that of light is ascent, and there is a partition between them that prevents them from merging. However, through such governance [light and darkness] may merge and mix. Thus, [the intermediary] is the source of all evil because it comes from the mixing. If [the intermediary] did not mix [light and darkness], neither of them could find the way to the other. Thus, it has been concluded [contrary to dualism] that the governor of good and evil is one. If [light and darkness], due to their nature, prevailed over the intermediary and mingled with each other, then the sense and perception of the intermediary would not avail itself because it would have come under the sway of a natural thing. Hence, there would be no point in it being an intermediary, as the issue is the realization of light and darkness.

708 The Sabians were star worshippers from Harrān in modern-day southern Turkey near the Syrian border. They are distinct from the monotheistic group of the same name in Q. 2:62, 5:69 and 22:17.

3) Then, [Ibn Shabīb] said: [The Marcionites] have regarded the intermediary as finite and the other two [i.e., light and darkness] as infinite. The finite is below the infinite because the finite is less than a completion of the infinite, as in the relation of the short to the long. As for the human being, if it is the life in the body, then it feels and manipulates the body. It is necessary that there is an intermediary upon which the governance of the high [i.e., light] and the low [i.e., darkness] takes place: [the intermediary] manipulates them. Therefore, God is truly one, and the mixture and the imaginary things that have been cited are false.

Then, the Marcionite pointing to the mixture, which is his life, is an error. This is because no human being knows the governance of his beginning, can fix what is corrupted from him, nor remove what has attached to him. Therefore, it is certain that the Governor is one, that He is not the thing mentioned [i.e., the intermediary]. On the contrary, it is under the governance of the One.

Finally, there is no difference between the fact that a mixture originated from nothing was not mixed from a [prior] source and the fact that a separation originated from nothing was not separated from a [prior] source. Nor is there a difference between the fact that the possibility of change is brought to completion by the emergence of temporals – after they did not exist – by the power of a powerful one and the fact that bringing the temporals into existence did not turn the eternal into the meaning of the temporal. For these two [points] are one in terms of being removed from sight and imagination. *Help and salvation come only from God.*

#### [4.14. A Critique of the Doctrines of the Zoroastrians]

1) The Shaykh (may God have mercy on him) said: The Zoroastrians said: God was pleased with the beauty of His creatures and was afraid of those which would be contrary to Him among them. So, He thought about them, and from this thought Iblīs came into being. Some of the Zoroastrians said: [Iblīs] looked at [God] with the evil eye,<sup>709</sup> and when He turned around, He saw Iblīs and made peace with him on the condition that He would grant him respite and leave him alone for a period of time. When the

709 Lit. "He injured Him with his eye (*aṣābahu bi-'aynih*)".



time was up, God destroyed him. Hence, every evil is from Iblīs, and every good thing is from God.

If what they narrate is really their doctrine, then they are worse than all the Dualists since the latter adopted dualism because they considered the creation of something out of nothing to be inconceivable in the imagination and the doctrine of the creation of the world from nothing was an enormity to them. Then they thought that the world included both good and evil, and that one whose action is good and just should be characterized by praiseworthy attributes, whereas one whose action is evil and unjust should be characterized by blameworthy attributes. So, they judged it grave to attribute both [kinds of attributes] to the One, such that He is one, praiseworthy and blameworthy, as believed by [monotheistic] custom. Thus, they adopted the doctrine of two eternal [principles].

2) The Zoroastrians see it possible for the world to come into existence out of nothing and without a source. What is an enormity to them is characterizing one from whom good deeds emerge as committing evil. They do not say that God directly commits evil, but they consider Him to be "the mother [of evil]" because the vile thought is evil.<sup>710</sup> What originates, Iblīs, is evil and he is from Him. Thus, it has been established that [both good and evil] originate from Him. Nevertheless, this is what called them to the doctrine of dualism [that is, the belief that both good and evil cannot emanate from the same thing]. Therefore, the doctrine [of the Zoroastrians] has been contradicted.<sup>711</sup>

In addition, [on the Zoroastrians' assumptions] we cannot be secure from [God] originating a thought from time to time. Thus, all evil generates from those [thoughts]. If one wants to see that this impossible, the fact it happened once negates the impossibility, unless [the Zoroastrian] holds the position [that Iblīs was created] with good. So, perhaps [God] began him from a good thought,<sup>712</sup> despite the fact that when [God] let

710 See 2.19.

711 The Zoroastrian doctrine is incoherent because dualism is invoked to prevent one entity, God, from creating both good and evil, yet ultimately, through the idea of the "vile thought" they end up affirming precisely this. In al-Māturīdī's view, as he explains, other groups are more thoroughgoing in their dualism.

712 Following TA, 244, in reading "good (*khayr*)," rather than MS. 89r and K, 173, "evil (*sharr*)" to make sense of the argument.

[Iblis] leave until that time, either He did not know that [Iblis] would do evil, which is another evil, because ignorance is evil, or He left him despite knowing the corruption it would cause. Hence, this is an evil that originates from Him. Likewise, He either knows in advance what His thought will do, but still engages in thinking despite knowing what will come out of it, so this is evil, or He does not know, though ignorance is evil. Then, either He has [power] to prevent Iblis and subdue him, or He does not. If He can do it, but then leaves [Iblis] to corrupt the creatures, this is evil according to [the Zoroastrians]. If He is not able to do it, it is impossible for the incapable to be the Lord of the Worlds.

It may also be said: Then, He knows that when the term is over, Iblis will fulfill his promise to Him. Fulfilling the promise is good and true, which means that the [good] has originated from [evil]. In addition to the entailment of such a result for him, if [Iblis] is the source of the good from which evil comes, we condemn them to an opposite result in which we assume that every good is from Iblis, and every evil is from another.

Thereupon, how is [Iblis] secure in possessing power in a time in which he has no helpers other than himself and the cause for the existence of all things has helpers? Then, those of [God's] creatures who are Iblis' helpers will mix with those who are God's helpers in leaving Iblis without help! God is exalted above what the atheists describe.

3) If the Zoroastrians say: The peace [between God and Iblis] was for some benefit, such is the case with noxious vermin and harmful things; [so, one should not reject the belief that God, though He is good, might have created harmful things for some benefit].

Then, His being afraid of those who oppose Him requires being unaware of the fact that He is the Lord of all things. The same holds true of the claim [that Iblis afflicted Him by the] evil eye. In that case, if He is afflicted by the evil eye, one who has been overwhelmed and deprived of his power and knowledge is a lord not by himself, but by another, and a creator by another. Therefore, one should say that the deity of the Zoroastrians is not a deity, but a servant.

Then, nothing from these harmful substances is useless, so it does not cause harm by itself; on the contrary, it is harmful through a wise and



omniscient agent who will make it harmful to one and beneficial to another. Therefore, the doctrine of the isolation of the creator of evil [from the creator of good] is false.

Then, if the only problem with the creation of a thing *ex nihilo* is that it exceeds the power and conception of creatures, no one would hesitate to verify its truth. For the body's formation in the womb by natures, or its generation due to the movements of the stars, or the creation of the world from this nature, or from the mixing and then separation of light and darkness also exceed the aforementioned aspects [that is, they are outside the power of creatures and beyond imagination]. Whoever reflects on the reality of everything sees [that this is the case], since neither the sperm, nutrition nor wombs contain the meanings of the human being. Furthermore, the intellect, hearing and sight [of human beings] have come from [the wombs] by the determination of one who is omniscient and wise. Likewise, if all the various natures, as well as good and evil substances, were left alone with their own functions, neither substance nor creature would ever emerge from them. Therefore, it is more improbable for the intellect to say that [the world has come into existence through these]. *Strength comes from God alone.*

4) We have already explained the aspect of wisdom in the creation of the different substances, and that God's action is not characterized by [the evil that He creates]. Rather, His creation of [substances] as they are, from the ugliness of the ugly to the beauty of the beautiful, is the meaning of wisdom and putting everything in its proper place. And that God Most High has not created the universe for His own needs, though He creates essentially. He is a creator in order to bring into existence creatures upon whom He bestowed intellect and made them aware of blessings and troubles; they were tested by [Him] placing everything in its proper place and [requiring them to be] grateful for what He gave them as blessings. Despite the diversity of their substances, He has made all creatures evidence, a lesson, a test and an affliction, such that some substances have enmity and others friendship [for His intelligent servants]. This is so they become aware of how to protect themselves, what to be wary about, what to be afraid of, and the kinds of inspiration that lead to results that the intellect considers praiseworthy and avoiding [consequences that the intellect considers] reprehensible. By seeing various substances and states in terms of encouragement

and intimidation, the divine promise and threat are assessed on the basis of sensory knowledge because that is the way to reach cognizance, and by it, one is brought to perceive [their true] ends. *Strength comes from God alone.*

5) If it were possible to deny the origination of a thing from nothing because it cannot be conceived in the imagination, it would be possible for anyone with a defective sense to deny what is perceived by [that sense], since it is not perceived, with a denial that would apply to every unseen thing that [also] is not reached by the senses. This would destroy [the doctrine] of the Zoroastrians and others [who think like them] because the latter have followed in the footsteps of their forerunners.<sup>713</sup> Then, the conception [of something] in the imagination is supposed to be based on the perception made by the sense once it disappears. Thus, one conceives the state of sensory perception in his imagination or supposes its like in imagination.<sup>714</sup> Then, God, exalted is He, is not known through the senses, nor is there any example of Him in daily experience. Therefore, supposing Him [in the imagination from the senses] is refuted.

Then, the principle is that either conception in the imagination is sensory knowledge, or in sensory knowledge there is evidence for the necessity of knowledge of what was not sensed, because one cognizes [that thing]. For every sentient being is ignorant of the whatness and howness of the senses. Therefore, this applies to everyone who [has the same nature]. In that case, the senses must exist through the one who knows their reality and creates them. According to those possessing senses, it is impossible to perceive the creator of the senses through the senses. This is because every such person is ignorant of his own states and lacks the capacity to fix his broken parts. So, this necessitates that behind [the sensible world] is an omniscient and wise one who does not have the characteristics of sensible beings. Were it possible [that God had sensible characteristics, then] sensible beings could not come into existence from Him, just as they could not come into existence through the like of us. *Protection from sins and salvation are from God.*

713 See 2.5.1 for material relevant to this argument.

714 The first case is the imaginative recall of an actual sensation, whereas the latter is something similar generated purely in the imagination.